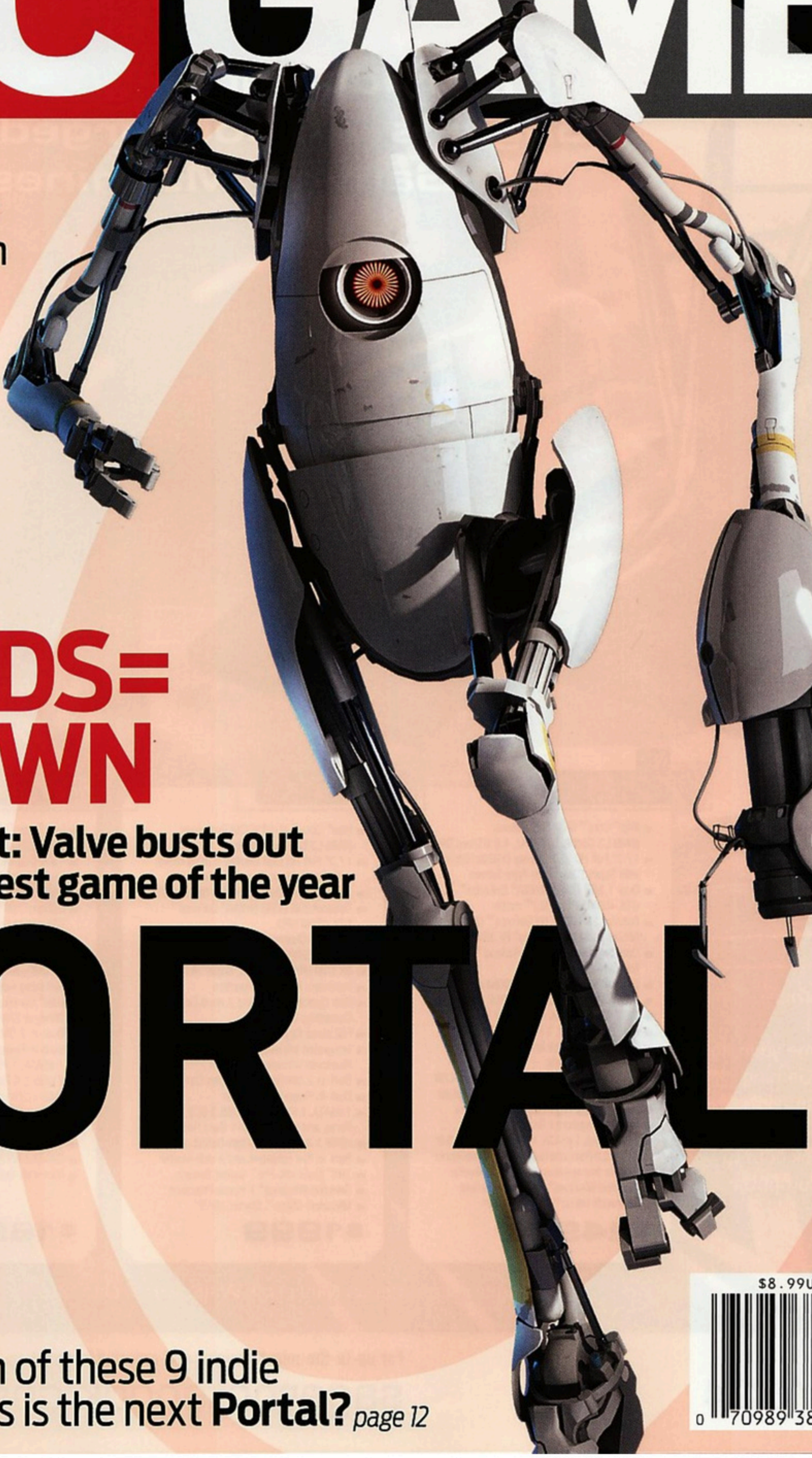
THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER®



HANDS-ON!

Our 18-hour marathon in **Star Wars: The Old Republic**

EASY PEASY

Get triple-A games for less than **$10**

KILL STREAK!

Weapons training in **Call of Duty: Black Ops**

MINDS= BLOWN

Our verdict: Valve busts out with the best game of the year

PORTAL 2

? Which of these 9 indie games is the next **Portal?** *page 12*

$8.99US

NUMBER 214
JUNE 2011

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

SAGER
THE PORTABLE POWER PEOPLE

Introducing Sager's Turbocharged Gaming Machines...

NP 7280

- Intel® Core™ i7-960 Processor (8MB L3 Cache, 3.20GHz, 4.8 GT/sec QPI)
- 17.3" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- Dual 1.5GB DDR5 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GTX 460M GPU in SLI™ mode
- Optional 2GB DDR5 NV GeForce™ GTX 485M GPU or 1GB DDR3 Quadro® FX 3800M GPU
- Optional 2GB DDR5 AMD Radeon™ HD 6970M GPU
- 6GB Triple Channel DDR3-1066MHz Memory
- Dual 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drives
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Hardware Raid 0, 1 Function
- One Optical Device and 3 Hard Drives Coexisting Capable
- Intel® Centrino® Ultimate-N 6300 Wireless LAN
- Integrated Bluetooth V2.1 + EDR Wireless
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Built-in Fingerprint Reader
- 1 HDMI-out, 1 eSATA, 1 FireWire, 2 USB 3.0, 3 USB 2.0 Ports, and built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- Built-in five speakers and a sub-woofer
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$2499

NP 8170

- Intel® Core™ i7-2720QM Processor (6MB L3 Cache, 2.20GHz)
- 17.3" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- 2GB DDR5 AMD Radeon™ HD 6970M GPU
- Optional 2GB DDR5 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GTX 485M GPU
- 8GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Hardware Raid 0, 1 Function
- One Optical Device and 2 Hard Drivers Coexisting Capable
- Full sized Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Built-in Fingerprint Reader
- 1 eSATA, 1 FireWire, 2 USB 3.0, 2 USB 2.0 Ports, and built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- HDMI 1.4 output for High-Definition Video
- Built-in five speakers and a sub-woofer
- THX® TruStudio Pro™ Sound System
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$1999

NP 8150

- Intel® Core™ i7-2630QM Processor (6MB L3 Cache, 2.00GHz)
- 15.6" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- 2GB DDR5 AMD Radeon™ HD 6970M GPU
- Optional 2GB DDR5 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GTX 485M GPU
- 4GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Full sized Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- Intel® Centrino® Advanced-N 6230 Wireless LAN + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Built-in Fingerprint Reader
- 1 eSATA, 1 FireWire, 2 USB 3.0, and 2 USB 2.0 Ports
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- HDMI 1.4 output for High-Definition Video
- Built-in two speakers and a sub-woofer
- THX® TruStudio Pro™ Sound System
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$1699

Blame your little brother.
Blame your high ping.
But never again, blame your rig.
The Sager Ultimate Gaming Machine–Built to Game.
Not to Blame. Call Sager today or visit sagernotebook.com to order your custom computer.

Sager recommends Microsoft Windows® 7 Ultimate

Call us toll-free at:
800.669.1624

For up-to-the-minute pricing and ordering information:
sagernotebook.com

NP 8170

- Intel® Core™ i7-2630QM Processor (6MB L3 Cache, 2.00GHz)
- 17.3" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- 1.5GB DDR5 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GTX 460M GPU
- 4GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Full sized Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Built-in Fingerprint Reader
- 1 eSATA, 1 FireWire, 2 USB 3.0, and 2 USB 2.0 Ports
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- HDMI 1.4 output for High-Definition Video
- Built-in five speakers and a sub-woofer
- THX® TruStudio Pro™ Sound System
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$1499

NP 8130

- Intel® Core™ i7-2630QM Processor (6MB L3 Cache, 2.00GHz)
- 15.6" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Matte Finished Screen
- 1.5GB DDR5 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GTX 460M GPU
- 8GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Full sized Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Built-in Fingerprint Reader
- 1 eSATA, 1 FireWire, 2 USB 3.0, and 2 USB 2.0 Ports
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- HDMI 1.4 output for High-Definition Video
- Built-in two speakers and a sub-woofer
- THX® TruStudio Pro™ Sound System
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$1299
After $160 instant savings!

NP 2190

- Intel® Core™ i5-2520M Processor (3MB L3 Cache, 2.50GHz)
- 15.6" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Matte Finished Screen
- 2GB DDR3 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GT 540M GPU with Optimus™ Technology / Embedded Intel HD Graphics
- 8GB DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Full sized Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- 1 USB 3.0 Port and 2 USB 2.0 Ports support Power USB
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- HDMI output for High-Definition Video
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$1099

NP 5170

- Intel® Core™ i7-2630QM Processor (6MB L3 Cache, 2.00GHz)
- 17.3" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- 1GB DDR3 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GT 540M GPU with Optimus™ Technology / Embedded Intel HD Graphics
- 4GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 320GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Full sized Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- 1 eSATA, 2 USB 3.0, and 2 USB 2.0 Ports
- HDMI 1.4 output for High-Definition Video
- 3D Stereo Enhanced with THX® Sound System
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$999

NP 5160

- Intel® Core™ i7-2630QM Processor (6MB L3 Cache, 2.00GHz)
- 15.6" HD LED Display (1366x768) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- 15.6" Full HD LED Display (1920x1080) optional
- 1GB DDR3 NVIDIA® GeForce™ GT 540M GPU with Optimus™ Technology / Embedded Intel HD Graphics
- 4GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1333MHz
- 320GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- 8X DVD±R/RW/4X +DL Super Multi Drive
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n + Bluetooth Wireless Combo
- Built-in 2.0M High-Res. Video Camera
- Built-in Fingerprint Reader
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- 1 eSATA, 2 USB 3.0, and 2 USB 2.0 Ports
- HDMI 1.4 output for High-Definition Video
- 3D Stereo Enhanced with THX® Sound System
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$899

NP 3101

- Intel® Core™ i3-330UM Processor (3MB L3 Cache, 1.20GHz)
- 13.3" HD Display (1366x768) with Super Clear Glare Type Screen
- Intel GMA HD Graphics with Shared Memory up to 1.7GB
- 4GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 800MHz
- 500GB 7200RPM SATA-300 Hard Drive
- Integrated Wireless LAN 802.11b/g/n
- Integrated Bluetooth V2.1 + EDR Wireless
- Built-in 1.3M High-Res. Video Camera
- 3 USB 2.0 Ports
- Built-in 3-in-1 Card Reader
- HDMI output for High-Definition Video
- Ultra-lightweight design, weight only 3.4 Lbs with battery pack
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium
- Microsoft Office™ Starter 2010*

$799

intel inside
CORE i7
Visibly Smart
NEW

Dealer/VAR, Government and Corporate pricing are available. Please call for details.

Sager One Year Limited Warranty Policy: 30-Day Money-Back Guarantee. If the equipment does not work as promised, or if you are not fully satisfied, we will issue a full refund upon the return of all original equipment. 1-Year Parts and Labor Limited Warranty. Lifetime Toll-Free Technical Support. Sager One Year Limited Warranty and Three Year Limited Warranty Policy Applies to End Users in the United States of America only. **Extended Warranty Available:** Check out this comprehensive package of service/support. **Business Leasing Available:** Get your dream notebook with low monthly payments! **Sager Corporate Offices** 18005 Cortney Court, City of Industry, California 91748 Tel: 626.964.8682, Fax: 626.964.2381 Hours: Monday-Friday 7:30a.m. - 6p.m.(PST) American Express, VISA, MasterCard & Discover Credit Cards Accepted - No Surcharge. Cashiers Checks Welcomed. ©2011 by Midern Computer, Inc. All rights reserved. Celeron, Celeron Inside, Centrino, Centrino Inside, Core Inside, Intel, Intel Logo, Intel Atom, Intel Atom Inside, Intel Core, Intel Inside, Intel Inside Logo, Intel Viiv, Intel vPro, Itanium, Itanium Inside, Pentium, Pentium Inside, Viiv Inside, vPro Inside, Xeon, and Xeon Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries. *This PC is preloaded with reduced-functionality versions of Word and Excel that include advertising. Purchase an Office 2010 Product Key to activate full-featured Office software. All company and/or product names mentioned herein are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of their respective companies. Prices and specifications are subject to change without notice. Opened software and shipping charges are non-refundable. 30-Day money back guarantee does not include freight or shipping and handling charge.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.
PS3
PlayStation 3
PlayStation Network
Games for Windows
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE

HUNTED™
THE DEMON'S FORGE
"A DUNGEON CRAWL FOR THE GEARS AGE"
-KOTAKU
WWW.HUNTEDTHEGAME.COM
MAY 31, 2011
inXile entertainment
Bethesda™

© 2011 ZeniMax Media Inc. Hunted: The Demon's Forge, Bethesda, Bethesda Softworks, ZeniMax and related logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of ZeniMax Media Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. Developed in association with inXile Entertainment Inc. inXile Entertainment and the inXile Entertainment logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of inXile Entertainment Inc. Windows, the Windows Start button, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks and "PS3" and the PlayStation Network logo are trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Chimera Inferno 3

iBUYPOWER Recommends Windows® 7 Home Premium

The POWER of Six-Core within your reach

AMD Phenom™ II X6

The AMD® Phenom™ II X6 Six-Core Processor is the world's most advanced desktop PC processor!

FREE LIQUID COOLING 120mm ALL DESKTOPS

GAMER MAGE D245

- GENUINE **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **M4A87T w/USB 3.0 Card** Motherboard
- ATI® Radeon™ **HD 5450 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- Corsair **4GB DDR3-1333** Memory
- **500GB SATA-II** 7200 RPM Hard Drive
- **24X** DVD+/-RW Drive
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- NZXT Gamma Blue Gaming Case + **450W** Power Supply

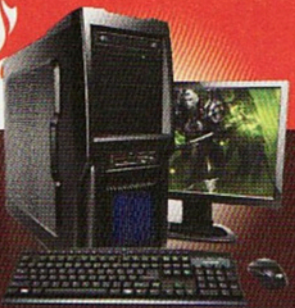
Color Options

TRUE USB 3.0

$499

AMD Phenom™ II X6 Six-Core Processor	1100T	$739
	1090T	$709
	1055T	$654
AMD Phenom™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	970	$614
	965	$599
	955	$579
AMD Athlon™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	645	$554
	640	$534
AMD Athlon™ II X2 Dual-Core Processor	265	$504
	260	$499

GAMER MAGE D415



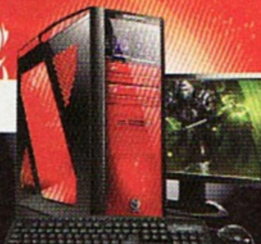
- GENUINE **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **M4A87T w/USB 3.0 Card** Motherboard
- ATI® Radeon™ **HD 5770 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- Corsair **4GB DDR3-1333** Memory
- **1TB SATA-II** 7200 RPM Hard Drive
- **24X** DVD+/-RW Drive
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- Azza Triton Gaming Case + **700W** Power Supply

TRUE USB 3.0

$594

AMD Phenom™ II X6 Six-Core Processor	1100T	$844
	1090T	$809
	1055T	$754
AMD Phenom™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	970	$714
	965	$694
	955	$679
AMD Athlon™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	645	$654
	640	$634
AMD Athlon™ II X2 Dual-Core Processor	265	$599
	260	$594

GAMER MAGE D295



- GENUINE **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **M4A87TD EVO** MB w/USB3 + SATA 6GB
- ATI® Radeon™ **HD 6850 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- Corsair **8GB DDR3-1333** Memory
- **1TB SATA-III** 7200 RPM Hard Drive
- **10X Blu-ray** BD/DVD+/-RW Drive
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- Thermaltake® V9 Red Gaming Case + **700W** Power Supply

Color Options

TRUE USB 3.0 + SATA3

$824

AMD Phenom™ II X6 Six-Core Processor	1100T	$1084
	1090T	$1059
	1055T	$1014
AMD Phenom™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	970	$974
	965	$954
	955	$939
AMD Athlon™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	645	$899
	640	$879
AMD Athlon™ II X2 Dual-Core Processor	265	$834
	260	$824

GAMER MAGE D355

- GENUINE **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **M4A87TD EVO** MB w/USB3 + SATA 6GB
- ATI® Radeon™ **HD 6870 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- Corsair **8GB DDR3-1333** Memory
- Intel® **40GB SSD** (Boot) + **1TB SATA-III** 7200 RPM HDD (Data)
- **10X Blu-ray** BD/DVD+/-RW Drive
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- NZXT® Guardian 921RB Red Gaming Case + **800W** Power Supply

Light Color Options

TRUE USB 3.0 + SATA3

$974

Intel® 40GB SSD

AMD Phenom™ II X6 Six-Core Processor	1100T	$1169
	1090T	$1149
	1055T	$1104
AMD Phenom™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	970	$1084
	965	$1064
	955	$1049
AMD Athlon™ II X4 Quad-Core Processor	645	$1029
	640	$1009
AMD Athlon™ II X2 Dual-Core Processor	265	$984
	260	$974

Toll Free: 888-462-3899 iBUYPOWER **www.ibuypower.com**

AMD®, the AMD® logo, AMD® Phenom™ II, AMD® Athlon™ and combinations thereof are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. All content and prices are subject to change without notice or obligation.

PC GAMER®

#214 **JUNE 2011**

Meritocracy

Money can buy you a slick campaign with billboards and freaky bus condoms, but, as we've seen in games with little to zero marketing such as *Minecraft*, whether or not a game succeeds on the PC is entirely a matter of ambition and talent. There's no monolithic agency dictating which games get to be published on the platform and which don't; there's no suit spending millions to prevent embarrassment when a game looks and plays better on a different platform.

This is why a relatively small developer named Valve was able to trounce one of the largest companies in the world, developing one classic game after another—including the highest-scoring game of the year so far, *Portal 2* (page 43)—while breezing past Microsoft to found the most successful digital distribution system for PC games. Meanwhile, Microsoft's own first-party PC game development is moribund and its take on third-party developers fleeing the Games for Windows Live platform is "We're taking all the right steps" (page 14).

And this is why Trion Worlds, Inc. is able to do the unthinkable and go up against *World of Warcraft* with a new fantasy-based MMO, *Rift* (reviewed on page 60)—and show distinct signs of success. We were ready to smack Trion down if it delivered a listless, me-too game, but breathed a sigh of relief when it brought instead fresh ideas and gameplay elements that appeal not only to MMO fans in general, but especially to those who don't feel served by Blizzard's formula.

This wild, untrammelled ambition, so unique to PC developers, continually broadens the choices for gamers and emboldens others to attempt the improbable and achieve the impossible. PC gaming is intrinisically, sometimes ruthlessly meritocratic. But would we want it any other way?

LOGAN DECKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Twitter: @logandecker

WHODUNIT

Evan Lahti
Senior Editor
Portal 2 is too big for one reviewer—'cause it has co-op. Evan teams with Dan to solve the two-man test chambers.

Dan Stapleton
Reviews Editor
Can *Portal 2* keep the laughs and mind-blowing puzzles coming? Dan dives in head first to find out on page 43.

Chris Comiskey
Managing Editor
Fact: manuals are relics in the age of downloadable games! Chris proves his point in the *PCG* Face Off arena on page 29.

Josh Augustine
Associate Editor
Josh infiltrates BioWare's Austin studio to get his hands on *Star Wars: The Old Republic*'s Sith Agent class on page 18.

EDITORIAL
Editor-in-Chief Logan Decker
Senior Editor Evan Lahti
Reviews Editor Dan Stapleton
Managing Editor Chris Comiskey
Associate Editor Josh Augustine
Interns Anthony Valva, Lucas Sullivan
Contributors Richard Cobbett, Desslock, Rob Zacny, Robert Hathorne, Andy Mahood, Jim Moreno, Jaz McDougall, Lizzie Cuevas, Tyler Wilde, Jonathan Cooper, Chris Hanel, Will Porter, Ryan Rigney, Rich McCormick, Derek Paxton, Tom Francis
Edit Squirrel Tabasco

ART
Art Director Dan Fitzpatrick
Contributing Designer Christin Chi
Photographers Mark Madeo, Samantha Berg

BUSINESS
Publisher Kristen Salvatore
ksalvatore@futureus.com
Vice President, Games Kelley Corten
kcorten@futureus.com
Vice President, Sales and Marketing Rachelle Considine
rconsidine@futureus.com
Executive Director Integrated Sales Nathan Hunt
415-269-5408, nhunt@futureus.com
National Sales Manager Isaac Ugay
714-381-3419, iugay@futureus.com
Regional Sales Director Carol Gillard
646-723-5476, cgillard@futureus.com
Regonal Sales Manager Arthur St. Germain
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
Detroit Consumer Manager Alan Dickinson
248-792-2408, alandmedia@comcast.net
Senior Marketing Manager Andrea Recio-Ang
650-238-2548, arecio-ang@futureus.com
Account Executive Ashley Kardel
akardel@futureus.com
Advertising Coordinator Austin Park
apark@futureus.com

PRODUCTION
Production Director Michael Hollister
Production Manager Larry Briseno
Senior Production Coordinator Dan Mallory
Print Order Coordinator Linh Chau-Ward

CONSUMER MARKETING
Vice President, Consumer Marketing Rich McCarthy
Circulation Director Stephanie Blake
Newsstand Director Bill Shewey
Consumer Marketing Operations Director Lisa Radler
Renewal And Billing Manager Mike Hill
Sr. Online Consumer Marketing Manager Jennifer Trinkner
Customer Service Manager Mike Frassica

FUTURE US, INC.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com
Tel 650-872-1642
Fax 650-872-2207

President John Marcom
Vice President/CFO John Sutton
Human Resources Director Nancy Durlester DuBois

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES
To Subscribe: www.pcgamer.com/subscribe
Customer Service: 800-898-7159, www.pcgamer.com/customerservice, pcgcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com

Future US, Inc. is part of Future plc.
Future plc produces carefully targeted magazines, websites and events for people with a passion. We publish more than 180 magazines, websites and events and we export or license our publications to 90 countries around the world.
Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).

Future Plc
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon,
Ba1 2bw, England
www.futureplc.com
Tel +44 (0) 1225 442244 (Bath)
Tel +44 (0) 7042 4000 (London)

Chief Executive Stevie Spring
Non-executive Chairman Roger Parry
Group Finance Director John Bowman

I pulled out a cigarette as I knelt beside the body. My partner—George G. Rilla—cupped his hand around my lighter, his silverback fingers shielding the fire from the rain. I studied the mangled orangutan, the smoke from my lips wafting into the night. "Another accidental hit and run, Detective Bananas?" he asked. I took another drag. "Nope. That's what they *wanted* us to think. This was personal."

PC GAMER (ISSN 1080-4471) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in South San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Basic subscription rates: one year (12 issues + 12 CDs) US: $29.95; Canada: US$49.95. Foreign: US$69.95. Canadian and foreign orders must be prepaid, US funds only. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688. PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand only specials. **POSTMASTER:** Send changes of address to PC Gamer, PO Box 5158, Harlan, IA 51593-0658. Standard Mail enclosed in the following edition: None. Ride-Along enclosed in the following editions: B1, C1, C2, C3, C4. Returns: Pitney Bowes, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, Guitar Aficionado, Guitar World, Knitting Today!, Mac|Life, Maximum PC, Nintendo Power, The Official Xbox Magazine, PlayStation: The Official Magazine, Revolver, Windows: The Official Magazine, and World of Warcraft Official Magazine. Entire contents copyright 2011, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in PC Gamer. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of PC Gamer. Products named in the pages of PC Gamer are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: PC Gamer Customer Care, P.O. Box 5158, Harlan, IA 51593-0658. Online: www.pcgamer.com/customerservice. Phone: 1-800-898-7159. Email PCGcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com. BACK ISSUES: www.pcgamer.com/shop or by calling 1-800-865-7240. REPRINTS: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com.

COMMUNITY DESIGNED GOODNESS

www.INFECTIOUS™.COM

Unique art skins for laptops, netbooks, iPhones, iPods, iPads, blackberries, & evo's.
Plus skateboards, art prints, wall decals, and T-shirts!

VHS Heroes by Hollis Brown Thornton

Artificial Dreams by Julie Dillon

Crust n' Rust by Urban Dirty

Supertape Cassette by Dennis McNulty

Retro Stuff is Better by Tony Aguero

JOIN the community
VOTE on designs
ENTER contests
WIN cash!

Repositionable!
Interchangable!
No residue!

Create your own custom skins
with our easy to use app!

INFECTIOUS

Infectious is a registered trademark of Infectious Skins LLC All images copyright 2011 Infectious.com and their respective artists.

CONTENTS

#214 JUNE 2011

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE
PC GAMER
MINDS=BLOWN
PORTAL 2
PC GAMER
MINECRAFT

MONITOR

12 » IGF's Odd and Amazing World
14 » News
15 » Realm of the Titans
16 » The Spy
18 » The Old Republic
23 » Guild Wars 2: Thief Reveal
24 » Dev Man Talking
26 » In Simulation
27 » Alternate Lives
28 » Tactical Advantage
29 » Face Off

PREVIEWS

32 » Frozen Synapse
38 » Warhammer 40K: Space Marine
40 » APB: Reloaded
41 » Release Meter

FEATURES

43 » Portal 2: Reviewed
52 » The Best Buys in PC Gaming

REVIEWS

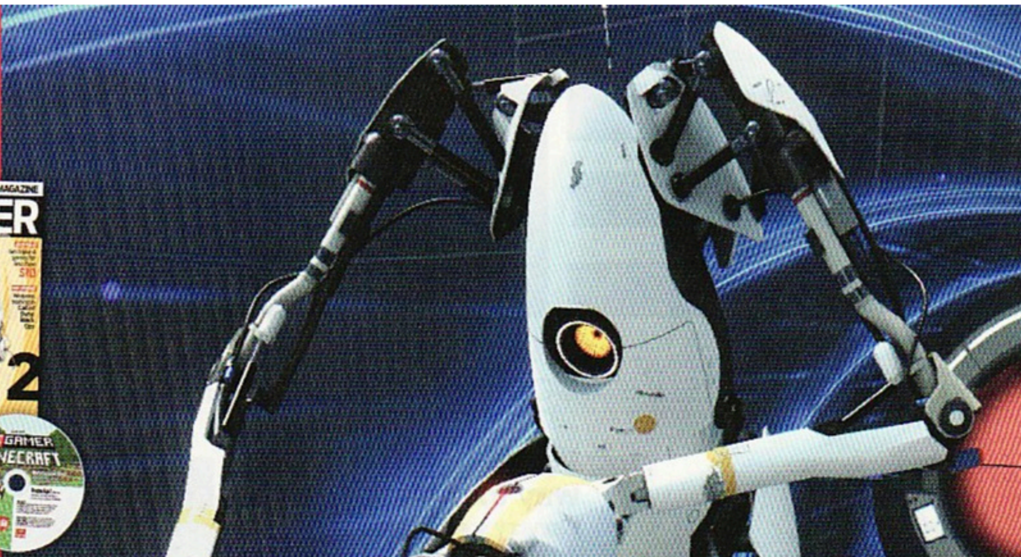
60 » Rift
64 » Assassin's Creed Brotherhood
66 » DCS A-10C Warthog
68 » Shift 2 Unleashed
70 » The Sims Medieval
72 » Painkiller: Redemption
74 » Atom Zombie Smasher
75 » LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars
76 » Inside a Star-Filled Sky
77 » APOX
78 » Men of War: Assault Squad
79 » Mytheon

EXTRA LIFE

82 » Reinstall—Police Quest
86 » Downloads
88 » How To: Call of Duty: Black Ops

The Hard Stuff

91 » HP ZR30w 30-inch Monitor
92 » Headset Roundup
94 » Razer Marauder Keyboard



PORTAL 2 43

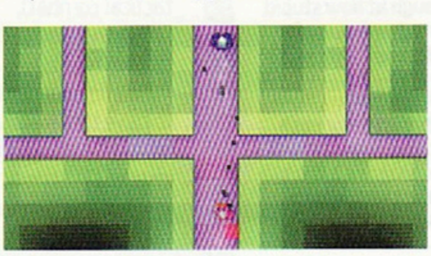
Tougher puzzles, twice as much to play, and two-player co-op. *PC Gamer* concludes: there's no such thing as too much *Portal 2*

HIGHLIGHTS

18 THE OLD REPUBLIC
Our marathon preview of the most anticipated MMO since *WoW*

32 FROZEN SYNAPSE
Top-down strategy fused to FPS skill

52 THE BEST BUYS IN PC GAMING
Cash in with our guide to cheap thrills



76 INSIDE A STAR-FILLED SKY
A never, ever, ever-ending 2D shooter

SEND

EMAIL letters@pcgamer.com

TWITTER @PCGamer

FACEBOOK facebook.com/PCGamermagazine

WRITE PC Gamer Letters
4000 Shoreline Ct, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080

Your emails, Facebooks, Twitters, and yes, we still get the occasional letter

BACK CHATTER

Just Cause 2 is a great way to relax. I surfed on a jumbo jet through a thunderstorm, all the time laughing maniacally and not once questioning how any of this was remotely possible. ***Old Splice***

Long live PC gaming!!! ***Dustin Steenbock***

Looks like I'm going Sith in *TOR*, thanks to *PCG*'s Empire guild. I'm usually a good guy, but I'll give the dark side a shot. **@Nightwing94**

Yes, excellent...give in to the dark side, young Nightwing94. Embrace your anger and use it to strike down your enemies. Anyone can join the ranks of our official TOR guild by going to http://bit.ly/PCGTOR. **PCG**

TF2 is such an awesome and hilarious game that it never gets me down, even as someone who sucks at online multiplayer games. When I die over and over, I don't get frustrated. I just laugh at how stupid my death was. :D ***Jimmeh***

I create my own character for each game. Sometimes I even make a chick. Don't tell anyone though. ***J33hopper***

PC Gamer: WINNING! ***Christopher Santine***

Vengeance is the best way to mourn

I'm very sorry to hear of the demise of The Spy's horse. To honor the woebegone Wogan, and mindful of his irrational state during his final days, I've decided to play a game of *Civilization V* as Gandhi, with Domination as the sole victory condition. ***Mark Lincoln***

Better late than never—we're happy *SC2* is here now!

No, I don't like my games medium-rare

I've always loved *Star Trek* and was excited about the possibilities for a *Star Trek* MMO. But when I was finally allowed into the *Star Trek Online* beta (one of the perks of buying a lifetime sub), I was very disappointed with what I saw and quit playing about two months before the game even went live.

It was infested with bugs, broken quests and graphical glitches! But what really drove me away was that Cryptic had created a cookie-cutter MMO from an IP that could have been so much more.

I'm glad to hear that they're trying to fix it (Massive Attack, March 2011), but the game has been live for a year now and it's still not in the shape it should've been in when it left beta.

Really, though, this isn't just a Cryptic or MMO problem. The more games I try out, the more I realize that they're getting pushed out the door in a half-cooked state, and the developers hope they can get it patched up before their playerbase jumps ship (see *APB*).

People complain about Blizzard's and Bioware's "We'll release it when it's done" approach, but I, for one, eagerly await their products because I know that the money I spend on them will be repaid with a quality piece of software. ***Josh Gordon***

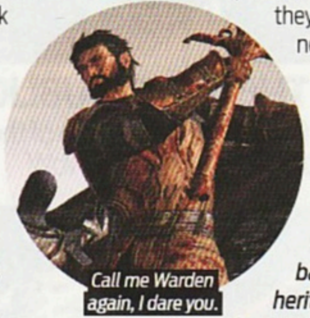
We know exactly how you feel. It's easy to get frustrated when that game you're dying to play gets continually delayed (our sympathies, Guild Wars 2 *fans), but it's usually worth the wait. We'd much rather play a well-polished, high-quality game in December than a rushed release in July. Hopefully the success of quality-first development studios like BioWare and Blizzard will encourage more developers to follow suit.* **PCG**

THE HOT MAIL

Forget the original

I don't understand why people judge sequels differently than stand-alone games. Look at players' reactions to *Dragon Age 2*: most compared it to *Origins* (which had more customization and tactical combat), rather than judge it on its own merits.

People expect sequels to have the exact same features as the original, but instead *DA2* has action-based combat and less customization of your character. It's still a good game; it's just different. I really wish that people would stop thinking about the previous game in the series—they'd probably enjoy the new game much more. ***Josh Shearer***


Call me Warden again, I dare you.

Its good to judge a game on its own merits, but it's also true that franchises come with a lot of baggage—a mixed heritage of gameplay, features, art style, etc.—that gamers, for better or worse, often expect to find in the sequel. PCG

A great letter deserves a great prize; that's why we're sending Josh a copy of *Crysis 2* in appreciation of his stellar correspondence. Look up top to see how you can get in touch with *PC Gamer* and earn your chance to win next month's PRIZE OF MYSTERY!

Nothing is safe!

Your review of the SteelSeries Cataclysm Mouse came a couple months late and $100 short. I could have financed my next four years of *PC Gamer* subscriptions with what Santa

> **I eagerly await Blizzard's products because I know they'll be quality.**

flushed down the toilet for that monstrosity. Shame on you, SteelSeries, but shame on me too for getting suckered by a glowing review on someone else's website. Do I have to start applying the cardinal game-buying rule ("Don't buy anything until *PCG* has cleared it") to hardware as well?
Carl Peterson

Life is full of risks, Carl, but there's no reason to take risks on hardware purchases. We've all been the victims of impulse buys (curse you, tempting Butterfingers at the grocery story checkout line!), but unless you're 100 percent confident you'll love a product, we always recommend waiting for our review first. **PCG**

The tables have turned!

You ask us all the time on Facebook what *our* most anticipated games are, but what are yours? **Nordmar Nogginfog**

I can't wait to jump into Guild Wars 2. *I'm also cautiously optimistic about* The Secret World*'s creative meta-game puzzles' system, which'll require the community to work together and research real-world myths and lore to solve complex riddles.* **Josh**

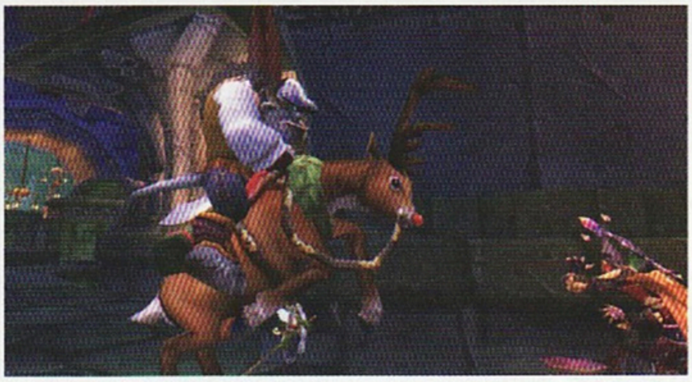
I'm looking forward to Skyrim, Mass Effect 3, *and* Deus Ex: Human Revolution. *I've also got high hopes for* Xenonauts, *an indie homage to* X-COM: UFO Defense. **Dan**

Monaco*: I'm already willing to put a ring on it. But I'll discreetly remove that ring and say I have to stay late at work when* Mass Effect 3 *comes out.* **Logan**

I'm impatiently waiting to chainsword Ork bellies in Warhammer 40K: Space Marine, *try out new, shiny outfits in* Mass Effect 3, *and shatter my index finger clicking away at* Diablo III. **Chris**

2011's biggest threat to my girlfriend is Red Orchestra 2. **Evan**

PRTSCN



With the whole Deathwing thing going on, the Undead forgot their true enemy: Tauren pirates riding reindeer! **Mike Bruclain**

On swashbuckler! On scallywag! On bilge-sucker! On landlubber! Yes, a pirate Santa cow is truly something to be feared. **PCG**

SHOW US YOURS Tell us your story with a great screenshot. Send it to letters@pcgamer.com and include PRTSCN in the subject line—you could win a sweet prize like Mike's new copy of *Crysis 2*!

So many minerals.

A couple that games together

About a year and a half ago, I started trying to get my girlfriend into games. I wanted to start with something simple and fun, so I introduced her to *Diablo II*. She loved it, and couldn't get enough!

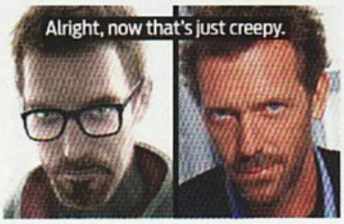
I know a lot of girls play *Sims* and *WoW*, but I'm always looking for new games to get my lady into! We play together a lot now, and look forward to many more issues of your magazine and great games! Maybe you could put together a list of PC games that are ideal for new female gamers. **Jesse Loboda**

If you observe that a particular woman enjoys a particular game, and then show her a similar game that you expect she would also enjoy, don't be surprised if she demonstrates no interest in it whatsoever. In this regard, women are just like men. For every Sims *buff, there's also a head-shotting FPS murderess, a cunning strategist and a theorycrafting RPG guru. It's impossible to come up with an authoritative list to cover all of those different types of gamers. Your best bet for introducing new PC gamers to the best hobby on the planet, regardless of gender, is to do just what you did: start 'em off with a fun game that doesn't have a heavy penalty for failure and see if it sticks. If you encounter indifference, switch tactics: try a different game or genre; try co-op or multiplayer games. But do not accept defeat.* **PCG**

Blasphemy!

My wife spotted the March 2011 issue of *PC Gamer* and asked me, "Who's the guy with the glasses? He looks just like Dr. House (from TV)." I explained to her that Gordon Freeman was the hero in the *Half-Life* series, but every time I see him now, I think Dr. Gordon House.
Nathan Sevrinus

That's ridiculous. How dare she besmirch the name of—oh. **PCG**



Alright, now that's just creepy.

Sad Panda's Correction Booth

We mistakenly referred to Dead Island *as* Dead Rising *near the end of the preview in our May issue.*

BACK CHATTER

I enjoyed Rob Zacny's column on *PG2*. It makes me doubly glad that I had just, coincidentally, picked it up from www.gog.com. **@RitalinGamer**

The first game music I ever downloaded was the *Chrono Trigger* soundtrack. It was all midi and all awesome. I still have it on my iPod and listen to "Schala's theme," "Magus' theme" and the endgame "Lavos theme" regularly. **festa_freak**

My favorite soundtrack is definitely the *Assassin's Creed 2* original soundtrack. **trooperdx3117**

World of Goo's soundtrack is truly epic. **Daniel**

I always thought that *Half-Life 2* did a great job with its music. The music itself was just OK, but the *use* of it was superb—it would come in *just* perfectly at dramatic or tense moments. **Mindtaker**

WHERE WE PLAY

Play on the official *PC Gamer* community servers

Crysis 2
8.17.251.180:64000

Team Fortress 2
66.151.138.34:27015

ArmA 2
75.102.38.3:2332

Ventrilo (voice chat)
75.102.27.133:8220

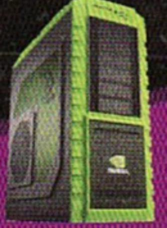
ART of WAR CENTRAL

Our game servers are provided by Art of War Central, *PCG*'s staff-approved hosting service. Visit **artofwarcentral.com**

CM STORM
ARMING THE GAMING REVOLUTION
GAME INCLUDED
SHATTERED
HORIZON

SENTINEL
Z3RO-G
DOMINATE BEYOND THE HORIZON

The Sentinel Z3RO-G is packed with 128KB Sentinel-X memory to store profiles and macros within the mouse itself which makes them available on any PC. User customized and configured features made instantly available through the Storm Tactics Multiplayer button gives gamers an unprecedented level of control and versatility in furious combat situations. The Sentinel Z3RO-G gaming mouse comes bundled with the vertigo inducing, adrenaline pumping Shattered Horizon PC Game; a multiplayer FPS played in zero gravity.



COOLER MASTER
coolermaster-usa.com

Chassis : HAF X Nvidia Edition
Certified by NVIDIA with specialized support and cooling for graphics cards, and massive airflow, this is as close as it gets to a system builder's 'dream case'.

Power Supply : Silent Pro Gold
Silent Pro Gold Series — a brand new lineup of power supplies that meet the 80 Plus Gold Standard with over 90% power efficiency.

amazon.com buy.com circuit city.com the all-new COMPUSA.com Fry's ELECTRONICS J&R MICRO CENTER newegg.com TigerDirect.com

CM STORM
Spawn

The Spawn gaming mouse is lightweight, ergonomically designed and forged with a reassuringly solid design. It is built for professional FPS gamers that prefer a claw grip.

- 3500 DPI Optical Sensor
- Right Hand Ergonomic
- 7 Button Assignment
- Superior Anti-Slip Rubberized Grip Design
- 32 KB Sentinel-X Microprocessor
- Backed by a minimum guarantee of 5 million clicks, the Spawn gaming mouse offers an extended gaming life-span for the avid gamer.

SPAWN
CM STORM

DOMINATION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

CM STORM
INFERNO

The raw power of the CM Storm Inferno Gaming mouse was barely contained by our experts at the CM Storm Labs. It is exclusively crafted for crucial gaming functions — fulfilling the needs of all FPS and MMORPG gamers whose demands require nothing less than the very best.

- 4000 DPI Storm Tactical Laser Sensor
- 128KB Sentinel-X On Board Memory
- Gold Plated USB
- 11 Buttons
- 9 Programmable Buttons
- MacroPro™ Key allows easy access to actuate pre-programmed firmware commands, such as Macros, Scripts, Mouse motion, and actions.

SCANNING . .
CM STORM

Cooler : V6 GT

Designed with a muscular engine look, the V6GT fits nicely with any performance hardware. Now compatible with Socket 1155.

Mobile Accessories : Choiix Power Fort

Available in 10whrs and 5.5whrs. the Power Fort brings extra power on the go to your portable devices.

Notebook Accessories : Notepal Infinite Evo

Sand aprayed aluminium surface. Two powerful adjustable wheel blower fans. 12"-17" laptops.

CyberPower Inc. | DIGITALSTORM CUSTOMIZED SYSTEMS | FrozenCPU.com | Performance PCs | Canada Computers | NCIX.COM | mEmory Express www.memoryexpress.com

August 4, 1956
n Term for Plot to Overthrow Shah:
USE ARREST IN WALLED VILLAGE

4

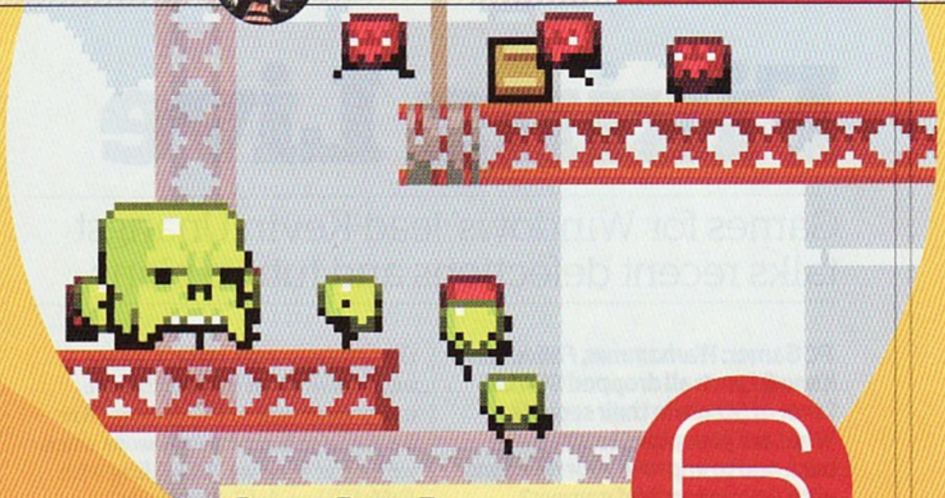
The Cat and the Coup

DEVELOPER: Peter Brinson & Kurosh ValaNejad
URL: http://bit.ly/IGFcat
RELEASE DATE: June 16
PRICE: TBA
DESCRIPTION: A political game with a twist: you're not Dr. Mohammed Mossadeg, Prime Minister of Iran, but his pet cat. You can scratch. You can jump. You can change history.

5

Neverdaunt: 8bit

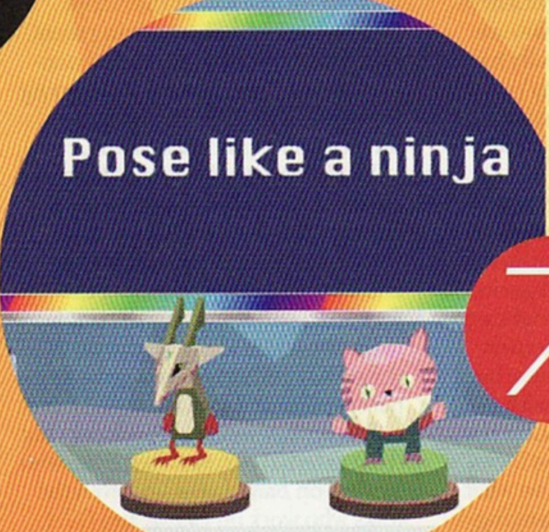
DEVELOPER: Robot Loves Kitty
URL: http://bit.ly/IGF8bit
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: Free
DESCRIPTION: A sandbox MMO where players build the world. Think *Minecraft* with player-made territory battles and integrated visual scripting.



6

Super Crate Box

DEVELOPER: Vlambeer
URL: www.supercratebox.com
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: Free
DESCRIPTION: No arty sentiment. No deep philosophy. Just you, monsters and an endless supply of weapons and enemies to shoot with 'em. Every weapon crate collected raises your score. It's simple, but simple doesn't mean easy.



7

B.U.T.T.O.N.

DEVELOPER: Copenhagen Game Collective
URL: www.brutallyunfairtactics.com
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: $3
DESCRIPTION: The chance to be punched in the face by your friends, now in party-game format!

8

Dinner Date

DEVELOPER: Stout Games
URL: www.thestoutgames.com
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: €4.95 ($6.82)*
DESCRIPTION: Experience the grueling pain of a man waiting for his date to arrive for dinner, who tries to convince himself that she's on her way, before giving up and starting to eat alone.

9

Octodad

DEVELOPER: A 19-student team from DePaul University
URL: www.octodadgame.com
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: Free
DESCRIPTION: You're an octopus masquerading as a human father. If you need to know more, you have no soul.

Fixing Live

Games for Windows' lead Kevin Unangst talks recent defections and future plans

PC Gamer: *Warhammer, Fallout* and *Kane & Lynch* all dropped GfWL in favor of Steam in their sequels. What are your plans to win them back and to improve your relations with developers and gamers?

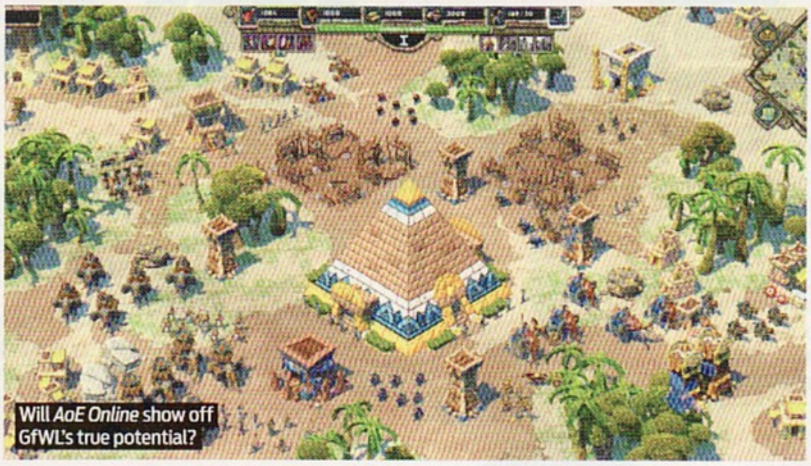
Kevin Unangst: There are many lessons we've learned. The big thing for us has been in-game features, friends and the chat. Those are important features and they, for the most part, certainly have worked well. When you have a first-party studio and partners who are pushing that service and really have a laserlight focus on what they're building and who they're building it for, you can distinctly apply those lessons.

We made [GfWL integration] easier to implement over the past year and made it simpler for publishers and developers to apply and get in. So I think we're taking all the right steps. And certainly with *Age of Empires Online* in particular, there have been lots of great conversations with the people developing and the Live team about having a really narrow focus.

I don't have any specifics on what things we're going to be changing. I do think the foundation is right. I think features that are in-game—the ability to transact, achievements, all those things—are right. Can we implement them in ways that are more appealing to PC gamers? Are we going to learn those lessons when we look at what we're building with *Fable* [*III*] or *AoE*? Absolutely.

Because we didn't have a viable store and a viable marketplace, there was an opportunity for Valve to step in and say [to developers], "We've got a great store with millions of customers. Why don't you appeal to them and have some great in-game services through Steamworks?" And they applied that lesson and took that opportunity, so more power to them. By keeping [the games that adopt GfWL] linked, but separating them by selling both Live games and non-Live games [in our store], we're going to get into that aggressively and provide competition for Steam.

The inherent value of the PC is that customers get a lot of choices. The fact that Steam, Good Old Games, Impulse and Stardock exist is great, and it's going to keep pushing us forward. I still think that the single most important thing we can do to drive PC gaming is have a great first-party studio and take the lessons. Not only from our internal developers but from external partners like Epic, who worked on *Bulletstorm*, and even the folks who work on *Fallout* and *GTA*. We've been listening the whole time and we're adding the things that they want into GfWL. ■ ***Anthony Valva***



Will *AoE Online* show off GfWL's true potential?

RUSH IT LIKE BECKHAM

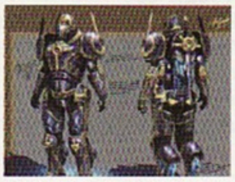
ESPORTS KOREAN *SC* LEGEND JOINS NORTH AMERICAN *SC2* LEAGUE

SlayerS_BoxeR was *Starcraft*'s first true competitor and has near-god status in the eSports scene. That's why it was such a surprise when he announced that he's leaving the premier Korean *SC* league, GSL, to join North American Star League. In his application, he said that his greatest rival was the Zerg. **JA**

TRIBAL WARFARE

JETPACKS HI-REZ STUDIOS ANNOUNCES SEQUEL TO *TRIBES*

We have fond memories of jetpacking, skiing and shooting our way around *Tribe*'s huge multiplayer maps near the turn of the millenium. But, you know what? That was a long time ago! Thay's why we're so excited to see the makers of *Global Agenda* picking up the torch with their newly announced *Tribes Ascension*. Very little details have been released so far, but the concept art we've seen looks promising. **JA**



NOW PLAYING

AT THE PC GAMER WEB STORE

So you're not SlayerS_BoxeR, and you don't have a whole country idolizing you for playing videogames—*yet*. It's never too late to become a gaming god! Start by picking up a game from www.pcgamer.com/store (remember to make it a multiplayer game or no one will care how good you are at it), and practicing for at least 12 hours every day.

Crysis 2

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

Major League Baseball 2K11

Shogun 2: Total War

Rift

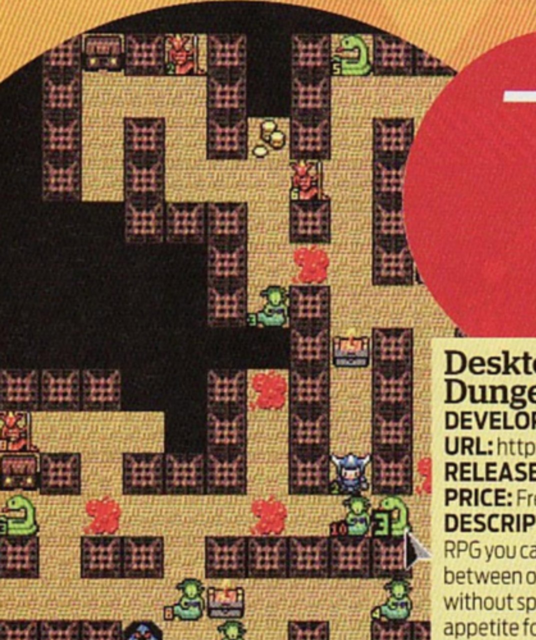
Maximum cultural phenomenon!

MONITOR

THE PC GAMER VIEW OF THE WORLD

IGF's odd and amazing world

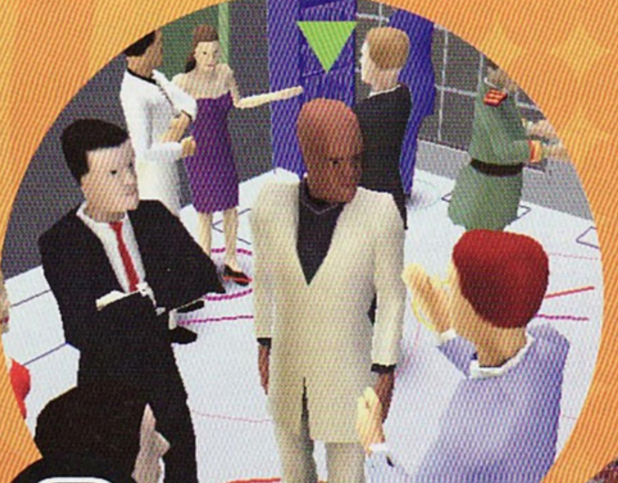
Looking for the most innovative games around? Don't bother checking store shelves; they're all busy collecting awards and nominations at this year's **INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL**. Meet some of the best ***by Richard Cobbett***



1

Desktop Dungeons

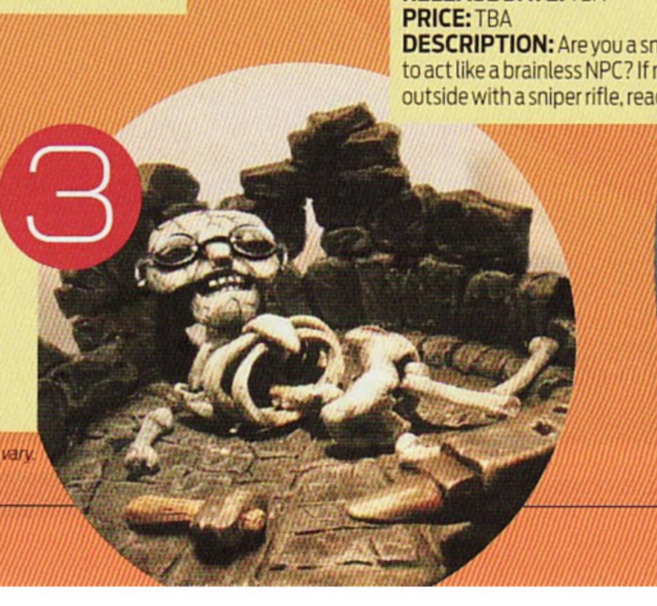
DEVELOPER: QFC Design
URL: http://bit.ly/IGFdd
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: Free
DESCRIPTION: The retro RPG you can dabble in between other games without spoiling your appetite for adventure.



2

SpyParty

DEVELOPER: Chris Hecker
URL: www.spyparty.com
RELEASE DATE: TBA
PRICE: TBA
DESCRIPTION: Are you a smart-enough human to act like a brainless NPC? If not, Player 2 is outside with a sniper rifle, ready to blow you away.

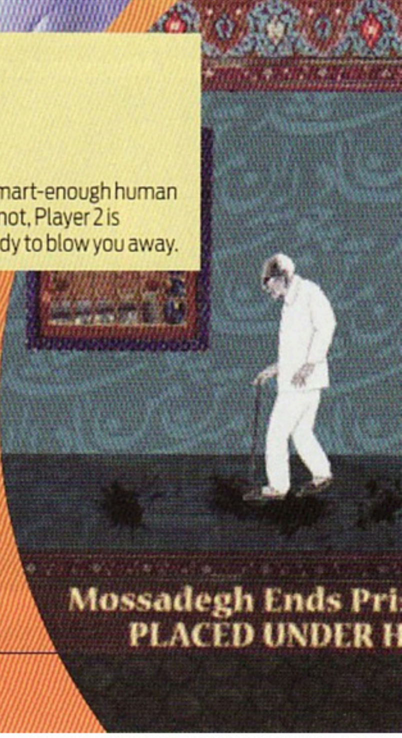


3

The Dream Machine

DEVELOPER: Cockroach Inc
URL: http://bit.ly/IGFdream
RELEASE DATE: Out Now
PRICE: €13.75 ($18.95)*
DESCRIPTION: A wonderfully creepy, surreal adventure game made out of clay, cardboard, and other people's dreams.

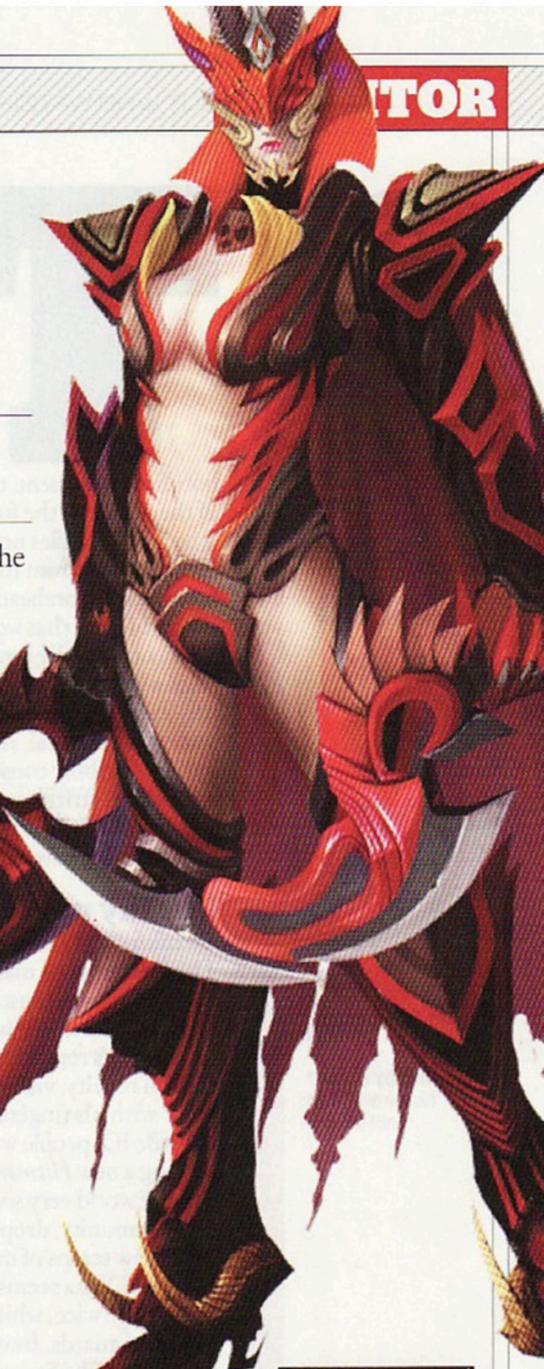
**Exchange rate calculated at press time. Current cost may vary.*



Slice, dice, and entice

Meet one princess who doesn't need rescuing: **REALM OF THE TITANS**'s Misrefel

It seems like just about everyone is making a *DotA*-inspired game nowadays. The latest to jump into the multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) scene is Aeria Games, with its upcoming *Realm of the Titans*. Much of *RotT* is designed to evoke the good ol' days of *DotA*, in both style and substance, while introducing a few new concepts as well. The game's skills system let you swap abilities in your arsenal (such as teleporting or life-steal) mid-game, for example. We have the exclusive first look at one of the game's heroes: this freaky headdress-wearing, dual-boomerang blade-wielding lady. An assassin-princess who killed her own father, Misrefel's sure to leave an impression—probably in the form of major flesh wounds. ■ *Lucas Sullivan*



Assassins have no need for stomach armor.

The four ways she kills

Cleave: Slash nearby enemies to give them the mother of all papercuts.

Tornado Blade: Chuck your blades and teleport to target, damaging and silencing them.

Eye for an Eye (passive): Whenever an ally is killed, you gain sight on and deal extra damage to their killer. Perfect for cleaning up after a team fight, like a vengeful lady justice.

Blade of Vengeance: Never let them escape: seal the deal by hurling a whirling blade at a fleeing opponent. The blade will hunt down your target and cripple their movement speed.

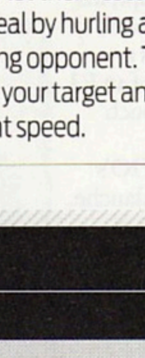
TRENDS

FACEBOOK TIE-INS

You can't always play the game you want: sometimes you're at work or on a netbook that can't handle today's blockbusters. Developers know this, and that's why they're building lightweight versions of their games on Facebook to let you keep playing the same types of game you love, wherever you are. **Josh Augustine**

Dragon Age: Legends

1 *Legends* is a more robust turn-based strategy game than *Origin*'s browser tie-in. Recruit your friends' character to your party in combat, build a castle room-by-room and manage the happiness of its workers as you task them with building items like exploding flasks. Best of all, you can earn up to five exclusive items in *DA2*—that don't break the game's balance.



FIFA Superstars

2 Plot trades to screw over your opponents, devise strategies to snake a last-minute win, curse out bad refs—sports management sims are deceptively intense. The scrolling play-by-play updates are absolutely mesmerizing: "Mackay makes a good strong cross into the box." "Thur misses the header and it sails out of bounds." *Stupid Thur!* Five hours of match preparation thrown out the—oh yeah, I'm in a meeting. It's cool, it's cool. Act casual.

Zuma Blitz

3 No matter how many colored balls you spit at the tribal gods, their anger against fun-loving frogs marooned on islands will never cease! But that doesn't mean you should stop. *Zuma Blitz* has the same addictive gameplay of *Zuma's Revenge!*, but in one-minute increments. Achieve the highest score you can in those precious sixty seconds to level up and unlock new powers and fight for the top spot on your friends' leader board.

THE SPY

The human face is an emotional ticker-tape parade. That's why The Spy invests so heavily in botulism treatment: there's nothing like that cool sting of the needle in the forehead. The resultant freezing of The Spy's muscles not only keeps his innermost thoughts safe from those who might be on the lookout for an errant forehead wrinkle, but also gives him a youthful glow that works wonders with the ladies.

Of course, fully removing the emotions from a human's face in preparation for a mission renders one's powers of speech somewhat comical, reducing words to a string of dribbly consonants. "Hrrrrrh ddddbbbb cffffff lmmmmm." That's what asking for a "half double-decaffeinated half-caf, with a twist of lemon" sounds like.

The Spy stubbed his toe and could not scream.

Royalty never smiles

Thankfully, The Spy has gadgets to help. The Debotulator manipulates The Spy's resistant mouth muscles to mimic any number of different voices, allowing him to talk his way past IO Interactive's receptionist by claiming to be a member of Danish royalty, visiting to see *Hitman V*. The Spy made a "V" with his fingers, just for fun.

Inside IO, people were busy. They are definitely making a new *Hitman*. In fact, they're preparing to show it to the world very soon. They're already toying with the community, dropping an image of a cutscene script with a few scraps of information. In the script, his assistant Diana seems to be a lot more involved, appearing twice, while Agent 47 dispatches a couple of guards. Internally, the chatter is of an E3 reveal, but The Spy expects something a touch sooner. The Spy smirked. Well, he tried.

Next, The Spy slipped over to the HQ of IO's Scandinavian brothers, *Just Cause* devs Avalanche. It was minus OMG degrees—so cold that not even the Debotulator could unfreeze The Spy's face. Brute-force entry was required, so The Spy planted a limping kitten robot in a tree outside the building. The office emptied in sympathy.

Inside, The Spy uncovered two notes of interest: the company's currently working on a multiplayer game—not to the scale of *Just Cause 2*, but with plenty of their trademark over-the-top action. It's download-only and so far only listed as a console game, but expect it on the PC: *Just Cause 2* DLC did very well on Steam, after all. They were also working on a game called *Arcadia* for THQ, but it was ultimately canceled.

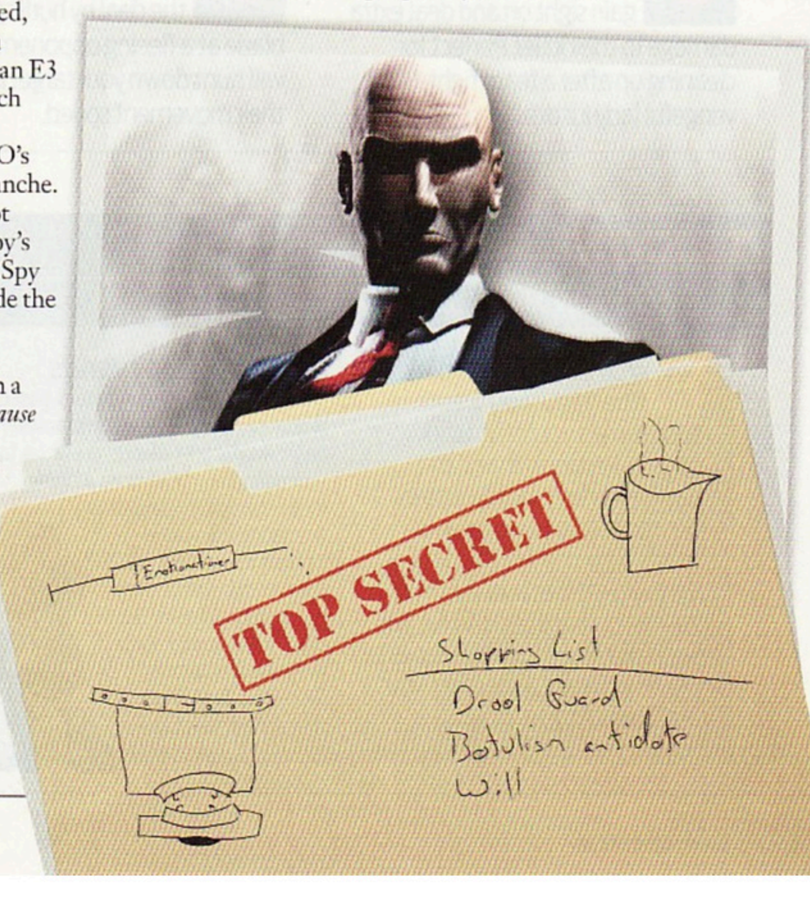
When the staff realized the kitten was just a robot decoy, they rushed back into the building and went into lockdown, sealing off all exits. So The Spy left through one of the many entrances instead.

Oh, to be Chad

We meet again, Rockstar. Frozen faces, fake royalty and kittens won't trick these twitchy developers. In fact, a direct assault won't do at all. Instead, The Spy hooked up with a casting agency working for Rockstar's parent publisher, 2K, that's full of security holes. They loved the lack of emotion in The Spy's jowls, and admired his headshots. While they were off ogling the photographic sexiness, The Spy steamed open a pile of envelopes. 2K's currently casting for a wide range of characters for a game referred to as Rush, a codename that's looking more and more like *GTA 5*. The LA-set game includes Brother Adam, a "Welsh monk/cult leader/yoga teacher" and Chad, a "[29-year-old] pretty boy misogynist Beverly Hills party boy. Made money, but not as cool as he thinks he is." There's chatter of it being unveiled at E3, but if the casting call is only going out now, then The Spy thinks that's a bit too soon.

> "2K's currently casting for a game that looks like *GTA 5*."

Thought you could slip that past The Spy, eh, Rockstar? You and Bethesda, both! The publisher of *Elder Scrolls* and *Fallout* is in the process of setting up a customer support office in Ireland, hiring hundreds of employees. Hundreds, Bethesda? What sort of game requires that large of a support staff? An MMO, obviously. The folks at Bethesda are gearing up to announce something big this year. ■ ***The Spy***



MAINGEAR
NVIDIA
GeForce

Reinventing: Performance

We gave performance a physical form in the shape of the MAINGEAR SHIFT with its award winning innovative vertical heat dissipation chassis and its supercar inspired Super Stock options that make it more than just a PC. MAINGEAR's legacy of quality and craftsmanship is realized in an impeccable collaboration of metal and silicon. Customized with the latest Intel® Core™ i7 Extreme Edition processors, overclocked to over 5GHz, and your choice of 2-way and 3-way SLI setups with NVIDIA® GeForce GTX 570, 580, and 590 graphics. While you have been dreaming about it, we have been busy making it better.

Visit: **WWW.MAINGEAR.COM/PCGAMER** to learn more

MAINGEAR

Become a fan **facebook.com/maingear** or follow us **twitter.com/maingear**

© 2011 MAINGEAR, the MAINGEAR logo, and the SHIFT are trademarks of MAINGEAR Corporation. All rights reserved. NVIDIA, the NVIDIA logo, and GeForce are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation in the United States and other countries. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. MAINGEAR can not be held responsible for errors in photography or typography. Actual case may vary in design. Availability may change without notice.

Massive Attack

Agents leave no trace, only bodies in their wake.

Sabotage, one world at a time

18 hours with **THE OLD REPUBLIC**'s stealthy, smooth Agent reignites enthusiasm for BioWare's story-focused MMORPG *by Josh Augustine*

It takes many types of force to impose and sustain a galaxy-wide empire. The Sith control with supernatural authority and an iron fist, and Bounty Hunters fill the ranks of their mercenary armies that wage war. But another branch of the Empire lives in the shadows, silently removing threats and toppling rulers to manipulate circumstances in the Empire's favor. At the front of this wraith-like army is the Agent, an Imperial Intelligence operative backed by the funds and resources of Star Wars' ultimate Big Brother organization as they travel the world to assassinate, infiltrate and manipulate on behalf of the Empire.

Double life

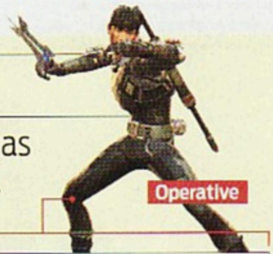
On a recent trip to BioWare's Austin office, I was given the opportunity to create a brand new Agent and play him for as many hours as physically possible in two days.

The first thing that struck me about the Agent's starting area (a crime-infested planet called Hutta, which it shares with the Bounty Hunter class) is that the story and tasks are actually quite different from the Jedi starting area I'd played before. They do an impressive job of replicating the lifestyle of a secret agent. Within the first hour, I'd snuck onto a neutral planet, assumed a false persona to infiltrate a Hutt crime lord's palace, paid hush money to someone who knew my secret and sabotaged a power factory.

Along the way, I also did plenty of straightforward kill-and-deliver quests, but there was usually a class-specific quest guiding me through the area that added more meaning to the adventure. When I was sent to sabotage the power factory (in order to earn the trust of the Hutt's security chief and increase his status so that he'd be more useful to me), I ran into a

Pick your poison

At level 10, Agents choose an Advanced Class (Sniper or Operative). Each has two unique skill trees, and they both share a third. Here's how they work.



MARKSMANSHIP	ENGINEERING	LETHALITY	CONCEALMENT	MEDIC
Marksmanship is the sniper tree: entrench yourself in cover and take out your enemies from a safe distance.	Don't get your hands dirty; sit back and let little robots fight for you. This one's all about controlling pet probes.	Add deadly venoms to your melee and blaster attacks, and exploit poisoned targets to further weaken them.	The classic rogue tree: stealth and daggers. Get in close without being seen, then stay there until your target is dead.	This was my favorite playstyle in the demo, letting me heal my allies with probes and bacta-syringe guns while hiding on the edges of battle.
Coolest skill: Snap shot (passive ability)	**Coolest ability: Detonate Probes** (45 energy, 20-second cooldown, 40-meter range)	**Coolest ability: Seeker Probes** (30 energy, 9-second cooldown, 30-meter range)	**Coolest ability: Waylay** (no cost, 15-second cooldown, 10-meter range)	**Coolest ability: Kolto Probe** (30 energy, no cooldown, 30-meter range)
Rolling into cover (hold Shift at any time to see possible cover locations and press R to roll into it like an action movie hero) makes your next Snipe instant-cast. In our books, it also nets you style points.	Blows up all of your probes (and you'll have a lot of 'em), dealing big damage to and rooting each enemy hit by the explosion.	Send out furious little probes (I like to picture mechanical bees) at your target, poisoning everyone around them.	Detonate a flash bomb and charge at a distant enemy, attacking them instantly and boosting your next attack by 20 percent.	Send a tiny droid to hover around your target, spraying them with bacta to heal them over time. Stacks up to three times, like the Lifebloom spell for *WoW*'s Druid.

small outpost of downtrodden locals. If I was headed into the facility anyways, why not earn a few extra credits by stealing some power generators and stomping in a few bad-guy faces for 'em?

Story time

Tales of *TOR*'s focus on story have not been exaggerated: it's immediately apparent that this is a BioWare game. The characters are charming, pitiful, disturbing and hilarious—always interesting and brought to life by the voice-overs. My personal favorite was a jittery Imperial captain who started off our conversation by confessing that he had accidentally murdered his entire squad when they threw him a surprise birthday party, but he thought he was being ambushed.

It's this extra attention to detail that adds BioWare's signature spark to *TOR*'s characters—even your own. When speaking with fellow Imperials, my Agent had an Imperial/British accent, but he adopted an American accent while he was undercover.

You're given opportunities to roleplay in conversations by choosing responses that are nice, neutral or evil, netting you Light or Dark side points at key junctures. The types of choices will be immediately familiar to anyone who's played a BioWare game. Here's one: a group of Imperial soldiers have been captured by a mad scientist and had their consciousnesses transferred into war machines. The last one with any humanity begs you to destroy them all. Do you oblige him and end their suffering or hand them over to the Empire to fight in the war?

Your choices can sometimes affect who your quest-givers are and what you're doing for them in the open world, but the real storytelling happens within the class-specific areas of the world. These are sectioned-off portions of buildings and zones that seamlessly place you into instanced areas when you enter them. Inside these areas, you choices can have real consequences on your story and the main characters in the game.

Your companions will weigh-in during conversations too, and your choices will earn their approval or disapproval accordingly, similar to *Dragon Age* (although in *TOR* you can only have one companion with you at a time). The Agent's first companion—Kaliyo, a free-spirited, selfish assassin—reminded me a lot of *DA*'s Morrigan: dark, sexy and disapproving of everything I did.

Taking cover

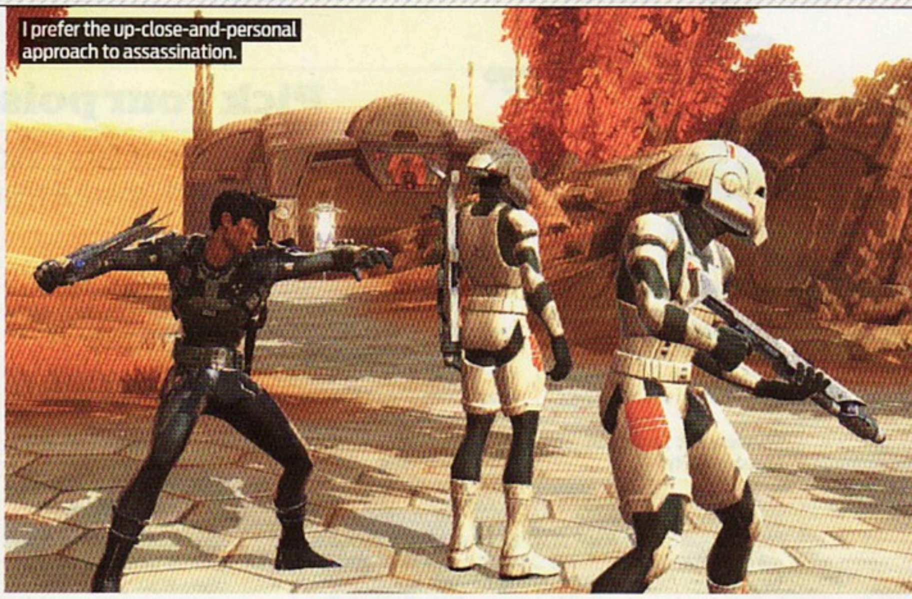
What Kaliyo and I lacked in kindred spirits, we made up for in kindred bullets. Kaliyo's bullet-spray-and-hand-grenade combat style was the perfect complement to the Agent's long-distance, precision attacks. The Agent's key combat mechanic—taking cover—is activated by holding Shift. When you do so, all nearby cover locations are highlighted in real-time; you can tap R to roll into the one you're looking at.

Cover functions fairly realistically: it isn't a flat percent-damage reduction. If you're behind it (based on line-of-sight) when someone shoots at you, it misses completely. If you're standing up and shooting at them, you're going to get hit. Cover degrades as it gets shot, and some abilities are designed specifically to shoot over cover or knock you out of it, so complacency could cost you.

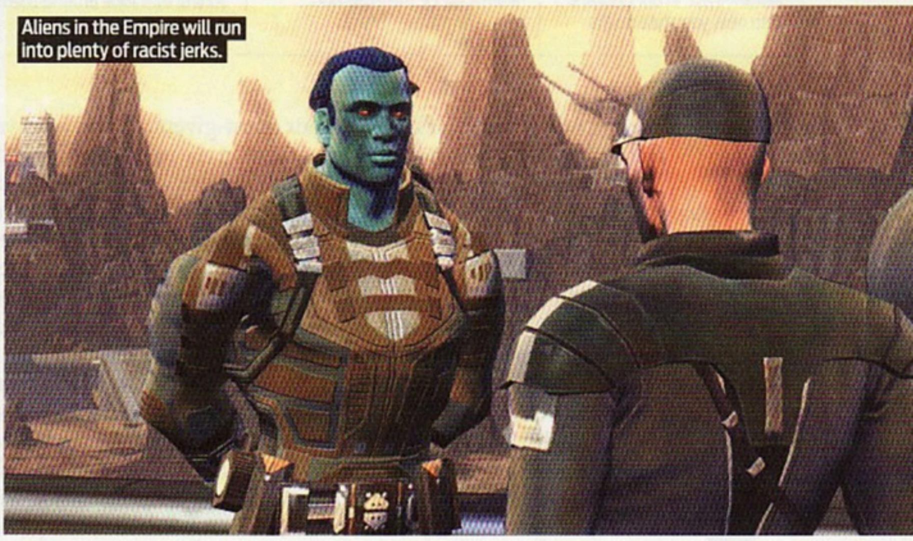
In addition, you have a few abilities that can only be used while you're in cover mode, such as Snipe (a high-damage ability with a

Dialog options let you be a stoic Imperial loyalist, if you're a jerk.

Armor sets are detailed and custom-tailored for each class.



I prefer the up-close-and-personal approach to assassination.



Aliens in the Empire will run into plenty of racist jerks.

long cast time), Suppressive Fire (a channeled spray-and-pray technique that hits all targets in front of you randomly) and Explosive Probe (sends a small probe to the target that explodes the next time they're hit).

Fighting is all about rhythm: whenever I found myself pinned down behind a rock with only a sliver of health, I'd start counting the seconds between my target's attacks. Once I figured out their rhythm, I knew exactly when I could pop up, unleash one or two shots and duck behind the rock again before they could hit me. It's a fun mechanic that encourages you to react to your surroundings, instead of blindly grinding through a combat rotation.

Of course, there were plenty of times that I ignored cover and simply went all-out with the run-and-gun technique, but I usually took a heavy hit to my health when doing so (think Han Solo charging at the Stormtroopers, then promptly running away screaming in *Episode IV*).

I'm in charge here

The group dialog system was one of the most worrying aspects of *TOR* for me—how could it be a serious roleplaying game if other players were able to choose your dialog responses? Thankfully, I found a "solo conversation" mode which lets you enter conversation modes alone, even while grouped, which lets control freaks like me always get the final word in our own story.

And there's a lot to talk about in *TOR*. After I left Hutta (I used a combination of assassination and evidence-planting to convince the Hutt boss that the rival gang on his planet was backed by the Republic, so that he'd reach out to the Empire for an alliance), I traveled to Dromund Kaas, a jungle planet with a bustling Imperial city built around a massive Sith temple.

More importantly, Kaas City housed a Imperial Intelligence headquarters, where I could meet my comrades in the secret police—who I could flirt with, incite or speak respectfully to—and be briefed in-person by my commander. Without spoiling the story, I can tell you that it takes a very interesting twist that involves rival Sith Lords, terrorist cells plotting to destroy the city and a cult of Revanites who worship the long-dead player character from earlier *Knights of the Old Republic* games—essentially, you.

It wouldn't be a BioWare RPG without some good ol' fashioned, off-screen sex. I needed to convince a woman at the local cantina to give up the location of her father's secret laboratory. I could've used force or bribery, but I went with flirting. A few minutes later and she and I were headed off-screen with that special look in our eyes and a promise for coordinates.

Side pursuit

While rummaging around Kaas City, I stumbled across all of the crew skill trainers and picked up a couple for my team. For gathering, I grabbed Archaeology and was surprised to find that, in addition to being able to mine crystal nodes around the world now, I had

Sorry, Hutt, I'm not here for the party.

Killing the other guy

Lead PvP Designer Gabe Amatangelo worked on *Warhammer Online*, and it shows. Here's what we know and what we've played of *TOR*'s PvP so far.

Combat

- Tanks "guard" allies to deflect damage the allies receive to themselves, and "taunt" enemies to reduce their damage output if they attack anyone but the tank.
- There is no player collision.
- Deflected damage, taunted enemies and other effects will be shown visually in the game world.
- As players are crowd-controlled, their Resolve bar fills up. Once it maxes out, that player will be immune to all control effects temporarily.
- The pace of the combat feels very manageable and not prone to burst-damage or instant kills.
- The cover mechanic combined with healing as a Medic Agent is very fun, and fairly unique.
- You cannot bring companions into PvP matches.

Rewards

- *TOR*'s Valor Rank is practically identical to *Warhammer*'s Renown: an alternate PvP leveling system.
- A badge system like *Halo: Reach*'s rewards you for streaks of success.
- Healing and damage absorption is tracked in the match stats to promote and reward tanks and healers.
- Players can "commend" their favorite teammate (likely healers and tanks) at the end of each match to give them bonus rewards.
- There will be separate PvP gear sets, which can be earned while leveling and at max level.

access to three rotating missions that I could send my companion on.

I happily sent my sourpuss companion Kaliyo to explore all of the galaxy's historically-interesting sites that the missions brought to my attention, such as a dead sarlacc that'd been dredged up to the surface. Each mission made my partner unavailable for a set amount of time (early on, it was just five minutes), and rewarded crafting materials—usually about the same amount of crystals I would mine from one node.

But Archaeology is only one of the 14 skills I found trainers for (you can only train three at a time). Two other highlights: Underworld Traders get access to a variety of illegal spices (no, not space cinnamon—they're drugs) that boost your combat skills temporarily, and Treasure Hunters' quests can haul in "Prototype or Artifact quality" items—potentially the most powerful weapons in the game.

My (former) lack of faith

Like many gamers, my hype meter was off the charts when *TOR* was announced, but it'd consistently dwindled down since then. But now that I've gotten to wade into the massive Star Wars universe that BioWare's building, and played around with how we'll be able to interact with it in a multiplayer environment, I'm thrilled. My enthusiasm for *TOR* is completely renewed.

Companions are the key to enhancing *TOR*'s roleplaying experience, providing a constant audience that responds to your choices in a genre that too often makes it easy to feel

The scenery is pretty, but I think it could use a little more red.

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe!

Personal quarters

We've toured the Agent's luxury yacht. Here's what it and other player-owned ships have inside.

Main room: Home to the central computer console and holocom for teleconferencing with other players and characters

Medical bay: Just a simple bacta tank and bed

Escape hatch: Has a still-unknown use related to space combat

Captain's quarters: Lush and relaxing; no fish tank

Cockpit: The galaxy map navigates much like *Mass Effect's*; flights are almost instant

Engine room: Shiny equipment, but contains no interaction that we've seen

Mission Terminal: Lightweight, with quests encouraging you to do activities you haven't tried in awhile, such as PvP

Storage: Crafting stations; cargo hold (bank), where you can send companions to retrieve items from while away from your ship

Companions: Each companion has a designated area, but will disappear while you're chatting with someone else, so there are no creepy stalkers in the background of your romance cutscenes

Other players: Invite friends onboard anytime

ignored. Combined with the genuinely engaging storytelling, the RPG side of *TOR* reminds me a lot of *Dragon Age: Origins*. The quest design is only as clever as it needs to be and doesn't mess around with vehicles or possession mechanics, and the game's PvP system feels like a refined and upgraded version of *Warhammer Online*'s.

Those are big-name games that pretty much dominated their respective fields: roleplaying, questing and PvP. I'm starting to believe that BioWare can pull off this massive undertaking—the most hyped and biggest-budget MMO of all time—and if they do, just about everyone will have a compelling reason to play it. ■

Join the official PC Gamer TOR guild right now at http://bit.ly/PCGTOR, no subscription or pre-order required.

Five finger discount

Hands-on with the many attack styles of **GUILD WARS 2**'s Thief class *by Josh Augustine*

The Thief is inspired by *Guild Wars*' Assassin profession, but *GW2*'s new engine and game mechanics really let this damage-dealer reach a whole new level of fast and frenzied combat. Many of its skills teleport you or include an evasion mechanic (you move so fast that you blur during combat, becoming unattackable for the duration). Execute your attacks perfectly and you can shred an enemy in no time; but missteps will leave you vulnerable to enemies in no time flat. We like it here on the edge: this kind of adrenaline rush is rare to find in an RPG. ■

It's looks so serene and graceful without the murdering part.

Leaping Death Blossom >>

Requires: Dual daggers

Easily the coolest-looking ability I've ever seen in an MMO: you jump into the air over the heads of your enemies, spinning at an insane speed with toes up and arms spread out like a helicopter of death. You evade during the whole attack and land behind your enemy, ready to stab 'em some more.

Steal

Requires: Fast hands

Swipe something off your enemy and use it against them. What one-use ability you get depends on the type of enemy you steal from. Against players, you get a random skill from their profession's arsenal.

Infiltrator's Arrow

Requires: Bow

It's not all about killing. Sometimes you just need to get the hell out of Dodge. That's when you shoot an arrow and instantly teleport to wherever it lands.

Dancing Blade

Requires: Sword and dagger

The perfect hit-and-run tactic. Starting at a safe distance from your opponent, sprint in (evading as a blur), strike them where it hurts and leap backwards (again, evading as you blur back to your original position). The low cost let me use this attack several times in a row to harass my target.

Overload

Requires: Dual pistols

Unload both chambers at an obscenely fast rate, shredding whatever poor sap you were pointing them at. This ability saved my life countless times when I got in over my head.

TO THE RESCUE!

DCUO ALMOST-MONTHLY UPDATES BRING CONSISTENT CONTENT

DC Universe Online's first two major patches brought a healthy amount of content to the young action-RPG MMO, although both have been Batman-focused and PVE-heavy. New Duo and solo instances and endgame raids expand the roles of Catwoman, Bane and Two-Face and introduce Penguin and Robo-Batman into the fray. Modest improvements have been made to the UI and auction houses have also been added. **JA**

MORE ON THE PC

DUNGEONS BIGGER MAPS, MORE MODES FOR TOWER DEFENSE RPG

The tower defense/action RPG hybrid, *Dungeon Defenders* will be getting several PC-exclusive maps with high-res textures and larger zones. Also new: a pet system, 4-player split screen and a mode where you must defend two ogres that insist on fighting the minion waves themselves. **JA**

THE END IS NIGH

HEROES SEVEN YEARS LATER, *CITY OF HEROES* GETS AN ENDGAME

Before Issue 20, you sort of had to make your own fun after you hit the level cap in *City of Heroes*. You could roll an alt, roleplay with friends, combine different powers in group settings or build your own content in the Mission Architect system.

Now you can raid too: level 50 characters are getting Incarnate Trials, huge raids that support eight to 48 players and scale to the number of players you bring. Each Trial is designed to take 30-90 minutes, with complex boss fights.

Thanks to the new Incarnate system, players can meaningfully progress post-50 by unlocking five unique ability slots that house extra-powerful abilities or modifications to existing abilities.

Trials should be a great change of pace for veteran *CoH* players, and might even give those that've left a reason to give it another try. **JA**

DEV MAN TALKING

Free-to-play (F2P) is a business model where a base game is given away for free, and the developer makes their money on microtransactions. You've probably heard of it: Riot Games' *League of Legends* is a popular example of a successful F2P competitive multiplayer game, and Turbine reports that its *The Lord of the Rings Online* and *Dungeons & Dragons Online* MMOs are more profitable after dropping their traditional subscription-based model and going to F2P. As a player and game designer, though, I'm most interested in the opportunities and challenges for game design that F2P offers.

The biggest challenge is that the game has to balance being complete and fun without requiring the purchased content, but having additional content that's still worthwhile. It's easy to do wrong: handicapping the main game so that players are bombarded by advertising, using timed "upgrade now" banners or having in-game NPCs hawk microtransaction content only frustrates players and drives them to games that don't use those tactics. Most importantly, designers shouldn't compromise their designs to try to entice purchases. Only allowing a few actions per day unless the player pays isn't F2P, it's just a demo of a bad game. Developers have to be willing to offer a full free game, and trust that a percentage of their players are willing to buy more. It's offering a free dinner, but charging for dessert. It's a leap of faith for game makers, and that requires having faith in their own game design.

Competitive multiplayer games offer an additional challenge. How does a game remain balanced if players have access to different content? How do you incentivize players to buy additional content in a game where the main focus is to defeat other players if the additional content doesn't directly help you achieve that goal? In these cases, microtransaction content has to offer breadth, not depth to the game. It should offer *more* options without offering fundamentally *better* options. After all, it can be fun to lose to a player who has new content, as long as that content is balanced; it's *not* fun to lose to someone because they paid more than you.

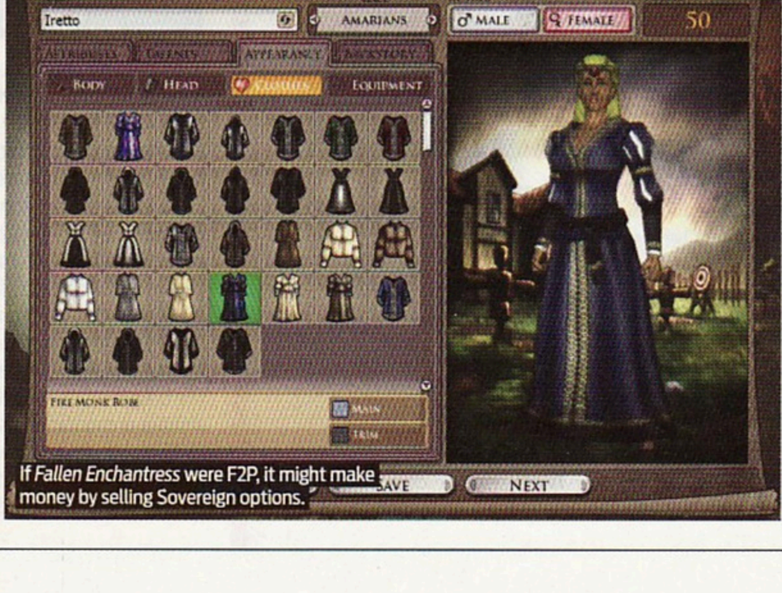
On the positive side, F2P offers opportunities for players and game designers alike. In the traditional model, after you've purchased the game, there isn't a direct financial difference for the developer if the player loves the game, plays it for an hour or never installs it at all. A free game, however, forces a focus on the *life* of the game, not just release day. Designers can react to community feedback, and have the financial motivation to continue to improve their games after release, since bugs and bad design have a direct, ongoing impact on sales. Every player that walks away is a missed opportunity, so players get better support.

> **"It's not fun to lose to someone because they paid more than you."**

That isn't to say that great gameplay hasn't always led to increased sales, but F2P makes these aspects even more critical. Fun becomes the most important factor for keeping players as paying customers, and designers are able to take risks that may cause marketing issues as long as the gameplay proves them out. Gameplay trumps content, since features like "80 hours of gameplay," "300 spells" or "150 cars" that drive people to make that release-day purchase become less crucial. Having a big-name franchise, movie tie-in or impressive screenshots matters less than the players' experience as he plays, and maintaining his desire to continue playing. F2P enforces that philosophy, incentivizing designers to find that ideal inner game and then build content around it to sell. Design is king; marketing may get more people to your game, but it won't sell anything if the game isn't good.

This isn't to say that F2P is the perfect model for all games. Smaller games, for example, may not be improved by extra content, and are best off with a single-price model. It may also be difficult to integrate additional content into story-driven games. For the games that avoid the pitfalls, though, the focus on gameplay, access to a wider player-base and excellent post-release support offers a lot of opportunities. ■

Derek Paxton is lead designer on Stardock's upcoming *Elemental: Fallen Enchantress*, and designed the *Civ IV* mod *Fall from Heaven*. He has an embarrassing fondness for the Muppets.



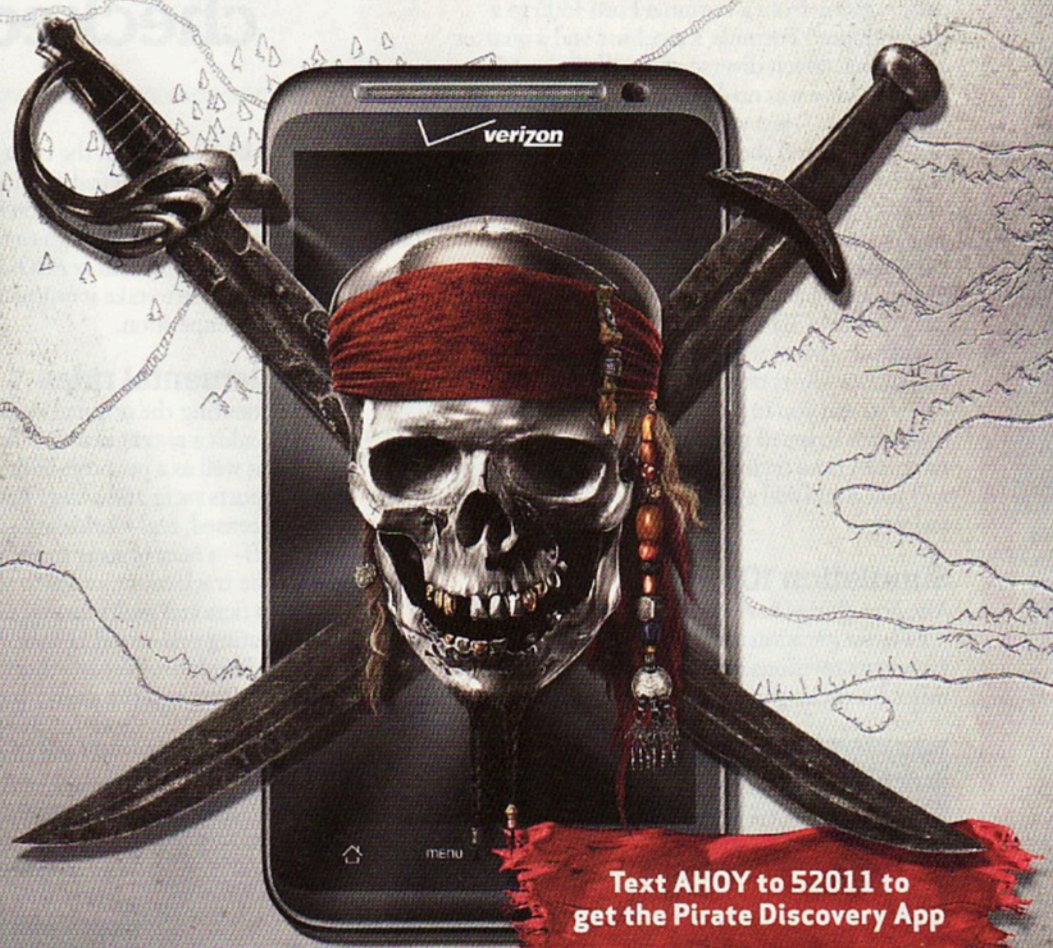
If *Fallen Enchantress* were F2P, it might make money by selling Sovereign options.

Disney
PIRATES of the CARIBBEAN
ON STRANGER TIDES
IN THEATRES MAY 20

PLEASE REFRAIN FROM REFERRING TO COWORKERS AS "WENCHES" AND "SCALLYWAGS."

Download the Pirate Discovery App for a look inside Disney's **Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides**. Watch exclusive content, talk about the film with other fans, buy tickets on Fandango, and play the Quest for the Fountain of Youth. The Pirate Discovery App, only from Verizon. Climb aboard.

climbaboard.com



Text AHOY to 52011 to get the Pirate Discovery App

ThunderBolt™ by HTC

verizon | Disney

Walt Disney Pictures

©Disney Enterprises Inc.

Message & data rates may apply. Subject to Cust. Agmt. & Calling Plan. Add'l charges apply for app. Offers & coverage not available everywhere. Available on select devices. ©Verizon 2011. Screens are simulated.

IN SIMULATION

When not brushing up on his Italian, **Andy Mahood** has been playing *netKar PRO*, *DCS A-10C Warthog*, *iRacing*, *Test Drive Unlimited 2*, and *rFactor*. Email him at insimulation@pcgamer.com.

One of the worst-kept secrets in the racing sim world is a unique online racing game called *netKar PRO*. It's been over four years since I last gave it a proper test drive (I discussed it in my January 2007 column) but news of a recent upgrade compelled me to revisit this fine Italian-built gem. It's my own virtual Tuscan vacation.

For those of you who haven't been reading my column since the days when gasoline averaged $2.75 per gallon, *netKar PRO* began its life as a downloadable payware project from Italian developer Kunos Simulazioni in 2006. The original version featured four single-seater race cars, ranging from a Formula Ford 1600 to a thoroughbred Formula 3 machine and a quartet of fictional (albeit diverse and well-designed) tracks. There was no AI to race against in the offline game—just you and your personal lap time goals—and the online game, while functional, offered only sporadic competition.

That's probably because with its perverse emphasis on realism, *netKar PRO* was aimed exclusively at the most demanding driving sim fans. You had to locate and manipulate the ignition and starter switches on your car's clickable 3D dashboard just to get it running, you could only drive using the first-person in-cockpit view and missed shifts or clumsy pedal-work could sometimes strand you in the middle of the circuit (or a gravel trap) with stripped gears and a burnt-out clutch. Spend too much time trying to crank the engine back to life, and you could add a dead battery to your list of mechanical woes.

Simulation 101

My, how things have changed since I last checked in. The latest iteration is officially called beta 1.3, and chief among its revisions is a relaxation of the no-compromises hardcore gameplay philosophy. The new *netKar PRO* is still a take-no-prisoners exercise in advanced driving physics, car set-up and data telemetry analysis, but casual racing fans will find it much more accessible.

For one thing, you no longer need an expensive wheel-and-pedal set to drive the thing (*netKar PRO 1.3* accepts joysticks, gamepads and mice) and changes to the user interface now support an elevated driving view for increased visibility. Throw in other "cheats" like auto-clutch, auto-shifting and a pre-started engine (you no longer need to locate and fiddle with any switches) and the entire experience is much less daunting.

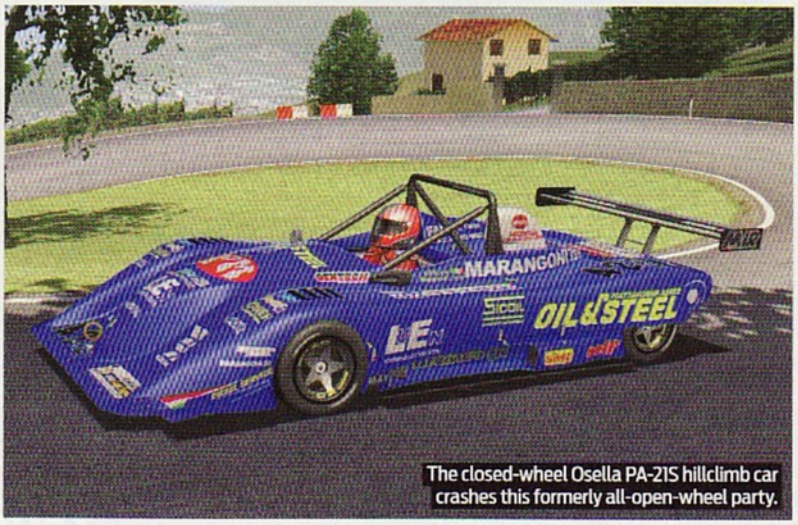
It's still not easy, though. You do need to keep these road rockets pointed in the right direction and, if you've been weaned on gamepad-friendly racers like *Need For Speed* and *Test Drive* games, you're gonna have to clean up your act if you want to go to the thoroughly entertaining places that *netKar PRO* can take you—doubly so if you decide to take it online against some warm-blooded competition.

> "*netKar PRO* has changed since I last checked in."

Supplemental rides

Supplementing the original version's four formula cars, 1.3 also adds a potent new 585-hp GP2-like single-seater, as well as a purpose-built Osella PA-21S hillclimb sports racer and a slidy Fiat Abarth AC sedan (both licensed, real-world cars). A Shelby Cobra knockoff—a *beast* of a car to drive—adds further titillation. The track count jumps to six with the addition of Aosta (a fictional multi-format test circuit) and the intimidating real-world 11-mile hillclimb course at Trento-Bondone. Wet-weather functionality (complete with puddling and tire spray) and a new track-editing tool finish off the upgrades.

I'd still like to see Kunos address the lack of AI competition and the buggy online component, where minor "touches" can sometimes lead to spectacular crashes, as those deficiencies still limit *netKar PRO*'s appeal with mainstream PC speedsters. Anyone who embraces the passionate process of making fast cars go faster, though, needs this one in their library. It's available via direct download at www.netkar-pro.com for a mere $20, and existing *netKar PRO* owners can carry their license keys over and download all the new stuff at no cost. This fleet-of-foot Italian is worth every lira. ■



The closed-wheel Osella PA-21S hillclimb car crashes this formerly all-open-wheel party.

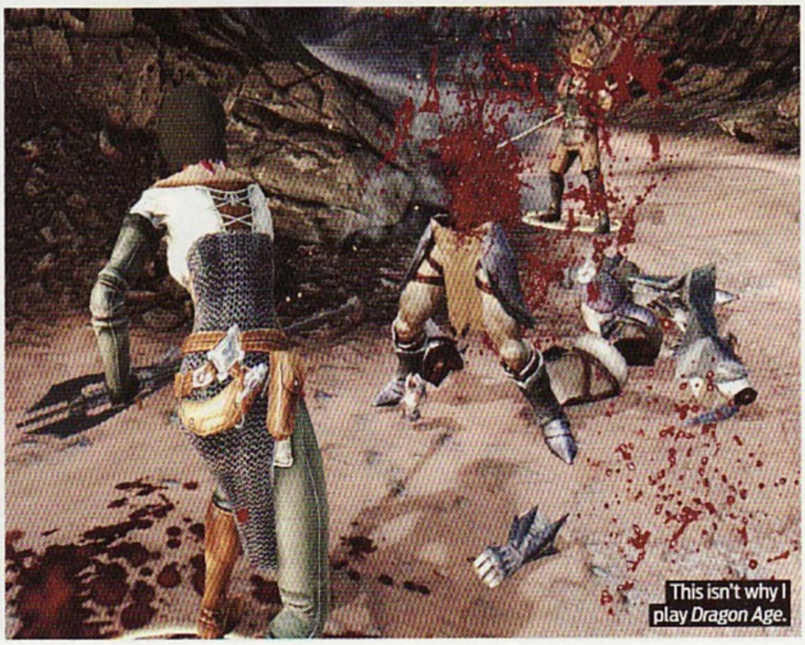
ALTERNATE LIVES

The ones we love always hurt us the most, and the roleplaying genre has, over its many years, inflicted its rabid adherents with a few post-traumatic stress disorder-inducing moments. The most infamous occasion was the 1994 release of *Ultima VIII: Pagan*, the sequel to one of the most beloved RPGs. It completely abandoned the renowned features of its predecessor, and its reception prompted a written apology by series creator Richard Garriott. The simplified *Deus Ex: Invisible War* was another PTSD moment, as was Bethesda's transformation of the *Fallout* franchise (for isometric perspective turn-based combat fans, at least).

Ultimately, whether or not you're traumatized by changes to a beloved franchise depends upon how much you personally cared about those specific features that were most mutated. I actually love *Fallout 3* as much as its predecessors, and wasn't remotely turned off by Bethesda's radical design changes, but other fans felt betrayed. Similarly, many RPG fans are enjoying *Dragon Age 2*, but for me, its release is very much a *Pagan* moment.

> **"The last thing *Dragon Age* needs is to feel more like *God of War*."**

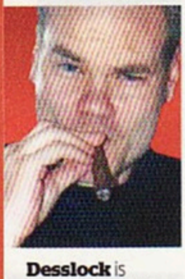
This is probably my most subjective point, but I really despise the graphical changes in *DA2*. I love the realistic, gritty artistic style of *Dragon Age: Origins*. It's grounded, and doesn't look like a cartoonish *Final Fantasy* game or an anime movie. It's Tolkien, as opposed to *World of Warcraft*. *Dragon Age 2* is the opposite: it's characters are blindingly colorful, with absurdly disproportionate features, twirling fancifully-oversized and apparently weightless weapons that detonate their cartoonish enemies into fountains of gore. I find it embarrassing to play a game that looks so childish. The last thing *Dragon Age* needs is to look and feel more like *God of War*. *Dragon Age 2*'s environments are attractive, but even that's offset by the fact that they're also recycled more frequently than in any previous RPG I can name (maybe in *any* game since *Halo*), and they're just as non-interactive and even more relentlessly linear than in *Origins*.


This isn't why I play *Dragon Age*.

What annoys me most, though, is the changes to *Dragon Age*'s combat. The tactical, isometric perspective has been pointlessly removed, characters hop around the battlefield like spastic Spider-Men, and combat is so frenetically paced that it's needlessly difficult to manage an entire party of characters. To compensate for the design (which seems primarily intended to allow gamers who don't like messing with details to control a single character) the game has been made incredibly unchallenging. Friendly fire has essentially been removed, since it's now relegated to an impractical option only available on the highest difficulty level—and it doesn't even work there, since the game clearly wasn't designed to accommodate it.

Also lost is *Origins*' feeling that each battle is a carefully designed tactical set piece, with enemies sensibly placed to utilize terrain features or otherwise effectively organized. In the sequel, enemies are generally just jumbled together in meaningless masses, and each battle is indistinguishable from the last. Reinforcements haphazardly appear in virtually every fight, often behind your party, rendering tactical placement pointless. The lengthiest combat sequences are just arduous battles of attrition against enemies possessing massive hit point pools, rather than posing more tactical challenges.

At least *Dragon Age 2*, unlike *Pagan*, does have some significant strengths, particularly in its storytelling. Additionally, the UI is effectively streamlined, and the new skill trees are an interesting way to shape character development. The look and combat aren't inherently poor, and would've been perfectly worthwhile in a sequel to BioWare's other experimental action RPG, *Jade Empire*. As part of the *Dragon Age* saga, however, this is more like a spin-off than a sequel. ■



Desslock is grudgingly playing *DA2*, but also *Drakensang: River of Time*, *Two Worlds II* and the apparently obsolete masterpiece, *Dragon Age: Origins*. Email him at alternatelives@pcgamer.com.

TACTICAL ADVANTAGE

Rob Zacny is the host of the Three Moves Ahead strategy podcast. He's currently playing *RUSE*, *Supreme Commander 2*, and *Company of Heroes*. Email him at tacticaladvantage@pcgamer.com.

RUSE, Ubisoft's unorthodox WWII real-time strategy game, is my hands-down favorite RTS of last year. It has one of the best interfaces I've ever encountered, and it deftly blends its novel deception mechanics with wargame-inspired unit balances and line-of-sight rules. It is everything I ever said I wanted in an RTS. So naturally, when I have a free moment to go online and play some multiplayer, I load up *StarCraft II*.

I am part of the problem facing most real-time strategy games. As inspired as a game like *RUSE* is, it cannot compete with the convenience that characterizes *StarCraft II*'s multiplayer experience. While I have seen *RUSE* search for an opponent in vain for 10 minutes, it takes less than two to find a ranked match in *StarCraft*. I would rather spend that time playing *StarCraft II*, even if I don't enjoy the game quite as much as *RUSE*.

My impatience contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy. When people like me abandon the games we love in favor of greater convenience, the matchmaking process only gets slower. I can't help but wonder how many people have picked up *RUSE* or the also-great *Supreme Commander 2*, grown impatient with their comparatively small communities, and gone back to the instant gratification of Blizzard's Battle.net. Players build communities by participating in them, and if people like me keep picking the low-hanging fruit that is *StarCraft II*'s multiplayer matchmaking, we will let the exciting and innovative games we always say we want wither on the vine.

If you build it, they will come

Certainly, developers and publishers deserve some blame for an under-populated multiplayer community. They may have created great games, but they have not built a satisfactory home for the community that plays them. Ubisoft and Square Enix, respectively, left the *RUSE* and *SupCom 2* communities high and dry. Compare their poorly designed leaderboards and ad-hoc Steam community pages with the multiplayer social-network Blizzard built for *StarCraft II*. From the first moment on the first menu, you're immersed in rivalry and community. Character portraits, achievements, and insignia are all attached to in-game accomplishments. Competition and online play furnish players with their identity. *StarCraft II* feels like a clubhouse; other communities feel like empty warehouses.

I worry, though, that I am letting *StarCraft II* set impossible expectations for the kind of service RTS games should provide. After all, demanding that smaller publishers spend Blizzard-like money to create a service around their games that can go toe-to-toe with Battle.net just isn't going to happen. It's really more a matter of reevaluating my priorities. A multiplayer front-end should matter less than the game behind it, and the convenience of a service like Battle.net should not obscure the fact that a community is built, first and foremost, by players: people who evangelize on behalf of their favorite games, welcome novices into their ranks, and, above all, play them online. To forget that and choose plug-and-play convenience over variety and innovation is to forget a big part of why I'm a PC gamer in the first place.

> **"*StarCraft II*'s online community feels like a clubhouse."**

So I'm making a pledge to put *StarCraft II* on hiatus for a little bit, and spend some more time on the other games that really excite me. If that means spending a few minutes waiting for a match, then so be it—I'll make myself a pre-game sandwich and grab a beverage. I hope you'll join me, because as Blizzard itself has proven time and again, a great game is worth the wait. ■

Regular Medium
715

Patience is essential in *RUSE* multiplayer—both for victory and to find a game.

Should printed game manuals still exist?

No They're wasteful, expensive to make and unneeded. Embrace the digital age!

Yes Done well, they add a ton of value and help combat the scourge of piracy.

LOGAN: I understand that manuals are destined for obsolescence. I get that, as physical, non-essential components of a digital product, they're headed the way of the "terrible lizards." But maybe that's exactly why publishers ought to bring them back. Gamers are wondering why they're paying the same amount of money for games that now come with PDF manuals and bizarre, arbitrary restrictions imposed by digital rights management, while publishers are complaining about piracy. So maybe they ought to start dropping gorgeous, full-color manuals in the mail to gamers who want them until they figure out how to deliver a better digital equivalent than a skanky PDF that you can't refer to while you're playing.

CHRIS: Yeah, a PDF manual seems like the lazy way out. But let's keep the bigger picture in mind here: developers and producers have to cut costs somewhere if they want to survive. That's simply the reality of it. Remember, games are actually *less* expensive than they used to be when you account for inflation. I'd rather forgo a paper manual than see a couple of guys in the QA department get axed, potentially impacting my enjoyment of the game itself. I mean, come on! Are you suggesting we bring back fax machines and ditch email just because that's how we used to do things?

LOGAN: It's not about how we used to do things. It's about a physical product that motivates me to buy *this* game instead of *that* one, and also happens to be a nice reward for being a legitimate customer. Plus, I remember how I used to love waiting for a game to install—because I could pore over the manual for every minute of it! By the way, do you know why developers don't include minigames during install and load screens? Because Namco Bandai holds the patent for it. Good grief.

CHRIS: There are so many ways that developers can avoid the clunky ol' paper approach. But the less reliant they are on archaic practices, the more creative they have to get. This is how progress is made. Take a look at *Civ 5*—the entire manual is in the game, *while you're playing it*. You can access the Civilopedia on-demand, any time you want. And since tutorials come standard in 99 percent of today's games, isn't a physical manual redundant?

LOGAN: I agree that the Civilopedia is awesome, but I think your chosen examples prove *my* point: I studied the *Civ 5* PDF manual on my phone obsessively for weeks. I squinted at the PDF on my phone on planes, at the gym, on the can—all 233 pages of it. How much cooler would it have been to have received a fat manual in the box that I could kick back at the park with? I know they're not cheap to produce, but if you're going to charge triple-A prices for a triple-A game, make it a triple-A production and reward your most loyal fans.

CHRIS: But you're also proving *my* point: instead of scanning tiny words on your iPhone, or spending hours churning through 233 pages of paper, you could've already been murdering Gandhi in *Civ 5*, getting voice- and text-delivered education along the way. The *Civ 5* PDF was a vestigial organ—it was by no means required reading. The future of instruction is interactive, and the less we shout to developers, "From my cold, dead hands!" for physical manuals, the less we'll find ourselves reading *about* games, and the more we'll find ourselves *playing* games.

LOGAN: You make reading a manual sound like a chore to be avoided. A great manual is a *pleasure* to be *enjoyed*. It's pitiful the way a boxed copy of a triple-A game—with a multi-gazillion-dollar promotional campaign and celebrity voice acting—so often begins with a cheap black-and-white pamphlet that feels like a flyer from an STD clinic falling out of the box.

CHRIS: You *enjoy* stabbing your brain with pointless info like: "WASD for movement! Magic Missile costs 13 MP?" I'd rather fire up *Oblivion* and hear Captain Picard's million-dollar voice than sit in a lawn chair and read that the Paralyze spell paralyzes people.

EVAN: *FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT!* ■

Managing Editor **Chris Comiskey** once broke three fingers reading a *Jane's F/A-18 Simulator* booklet. He has hated physical manuals ever since.

Editor-in-Chief **Logan Decker** urges gamers not to be too sentimental about the whole dead-tree thing: they'd kill you if they had the chance.

Who do you agree with? Be heard at letters@pcgamer.com.

Gamer Paladin D817

Intel® Core™ i5-2300 Processor

$699

TRUE USB 3.0 + SATA3

- Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

-2600K	$839
-2600	$819

- Intel® Core™ i5 Processor

-2500K	$744
-2500	$734
-2400	$714
-2300	$699

- Genuine **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **P8P67-M** Motherboard
- Nvidia® GeForce™ **GT 430 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- **24X** DVD+/-RW Drive
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **1TB** SATA-II 7200 RPM HDD
- Corsair Memory **8GB DDR3-1333**
- Azza Triton Gaming Case + **450W** Certified Power Supply
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- Optional: Nvidia® **3D Vision** Glasses & Monitor (+$499)

LAN Warrior II-67

Intel® Core™ i5-2300 Processor

$879

Color Options

TRUE USB 3.0 + SATA3

- Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

-2600K	$1019
-2600	$994

- Intel® Core™ i5 Processor

-2500K	$919
-2500	$909
-2400	$889
-2300	$879

- Genuine **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **P8P67-M** Motherboard
- Nvidia® GeForce™ **GTX 460 2GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- **24X** DVD+/-RW Drive
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **1TB** SATA-II 7200 RPM HDD
- Corsair Memory **8GB DDR3-1333**
- NZXT® Vulcan Gaming Case + **700W** Certified Power Supply
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- Optional: Nvidia® **3D Vision** Glasses & Monitor (+$499)

Gamer Paladin D895

Intel® Core™ i7-950 Processor

$1839

TRUE USB 3.0 + SATA3

SATA3

Intel® 40GB SSD

- Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

-990X Extreme Edition	$2599
-980X Extreme Edition	$2459
-970	$2139
-960	$1839

- Genuine **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **Sabertooth X58** USB3 + SATA3 Motherboard
- Nvidia® GeForce™ **GTX580 1536MB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- Intel® **40GB SSD** (Boot) + 2TB SATA3 7200 RPM HDD (Data)
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- **10X Blu-ray** BD/DVDRW Drive
- Corsair Memory **12GB DDR3-1333**
- Antec® 902 Gaming Case + **800W** Certified Power Supply
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- Optional: Nvidia® **3D Vision** Glasses & Monitor (+$499)

Gamer Paladin D875

Intel® Core™ i7-950 Processor

$1269

SATA3

TRUE USB 3.0 + SATA3

- Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

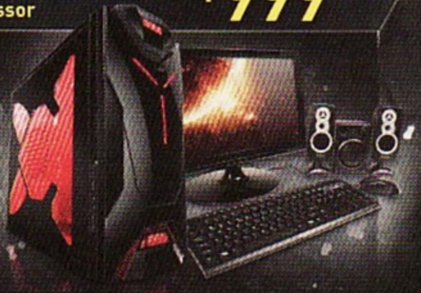
-990X Extreme Edition	$2009
-980X Extreme Edition	$1874
-970	$1559
-960	$1269

- Genuine **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- Asus® **Sabertooth X58** USB3 + SATA3 Motherboard
- ATI® Radeon™ **HD6950 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- **24X** DVD+/-RW Drive
- **1TB** SATA-III 7200RPM HDD
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- Corsair Memory **12GB DDR3-1333**
- Thermaltake® Element G Gaming Case + **700W** Certified Power Supply
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- Optional: Nvidia® **3D Vision** Glasses & Monitor (+$499)

Gamer Paladin D855

Intel® Core™ i7-950 Processor

$999



- Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

-990X Extreme Edition	$1749
-980X Extreme Edition	$1599
-970	$1289
-960	$999

- Genuine **Windows® 7** Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- **Intel® X58** Chipset Motherboard w/USB 3.0 Card
- Nvidia® GeForce™ **GTX 560 Ti 1GB** Video Card - DirectX 11 Support
- **24X** DVD+/-RW Drive
- **1TB** SATA-II 7200RPM HDD
- **120mm Radiator** Liquid CPU Cooling System
- Corsair Memory **6GB DDR3-1333**
- NZXT® Guardian 921RB Gaming Case + **700W** Certified Power Supply
- iBUYPOWER **Premium** Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers
- **Hi-Definition** Surround 3D Premium Sound
- Optional: Nvidia® **3D Vision** Glasses & Monitor (+$499)

Intel, the Intel logo, Intel Core and Core Inside are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries.
All content and prices are subject to change without notice or obligation.

iBUYPOWER Recommends
Windows® 7 Home Premium

intel® inside™
CORE™ i7
Visibly Smart
NEW

GRAB YOUR GEAR
PREPARE FOR BATTLE

ALL Desktops
FREE
120mm Liquid Cooling

MAGIC
MULTI-TOUCH ADVANCED GAMING INTERFACE & CONTROL

Battalion Touch CZ-12
Intel® Core™ i3-2310M Processor

$929

- Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

-2820QM	$1369
-2720QM	$1169
-2630QM	$1039

- Intel® Core™ i5 Processor

-2410M	$979

- Intel® Core™ i3 Processor

-2310M	$929

- Intel® HM65 Chipset
- Wireless 802.11n
- Genuine Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-Bit Edition
- 15.6" Full HD 1920x1080 Touch Screen Display
- Nvidia® GeForce™ GT 540M 2GB Video Card
- 500GB SATA Hard Drive
- 4GB DDR3-1333 Memory
- Removable 8X DVD±R/±RW Drive
- 1x HDMI + 1x USB 3.0 + 2x USB 2.0 Ports
- 1.3MP Built-in Digital Camera

Interactive Gaming

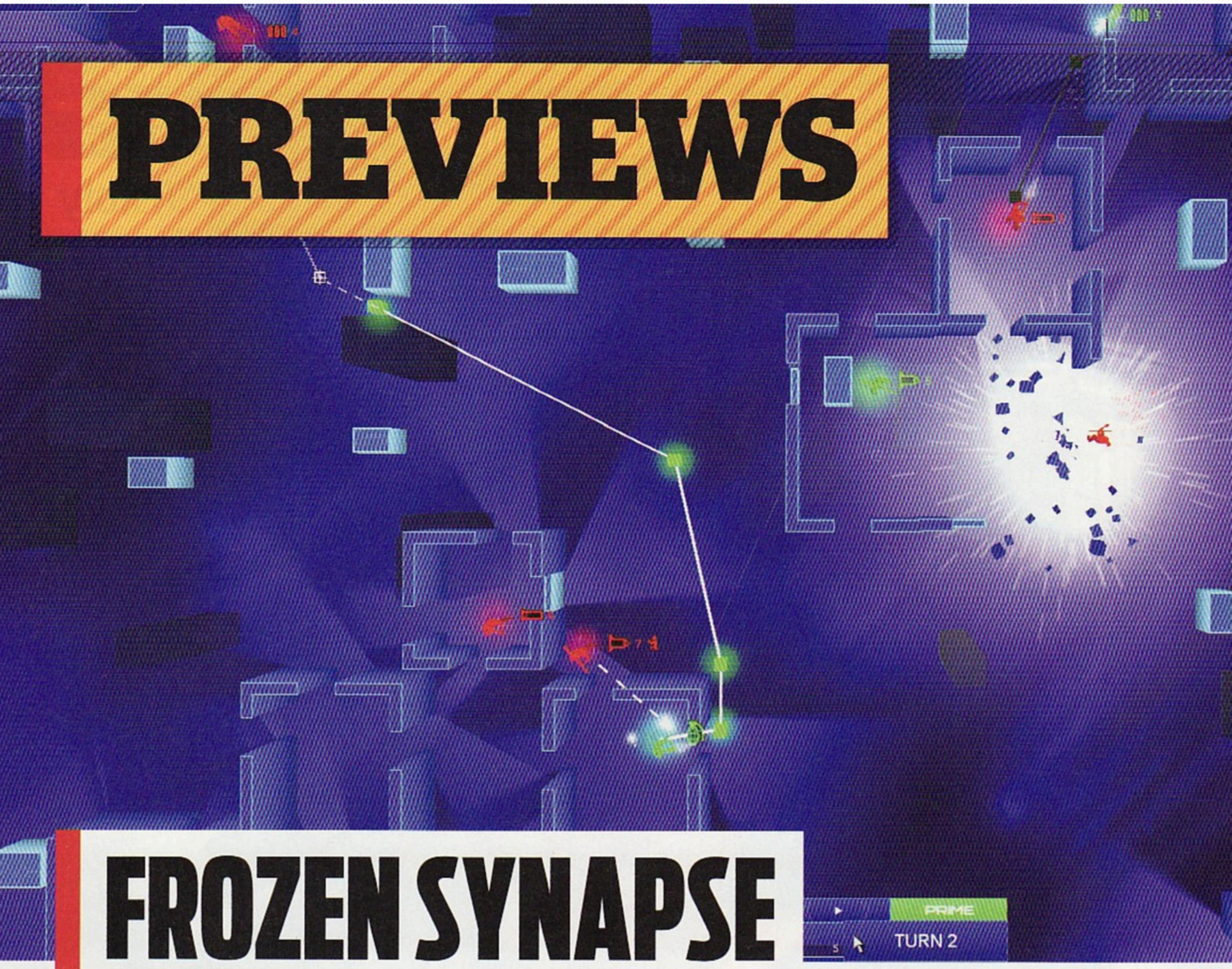
WORLD'S 1ST FULL HD MULTI-TOUCH GAMING NOTEBOOK

Call Us:
888-462-3899

Buy Online:
ibuypower.com

iBUYPOWER

PREVIEWS



FROZEN SYNAPSE

HANDS-ON Turn-based strategy that *Counter-Strike* fans can love

I've drawn a Venn diagram to represent my FPS and strategy gaming experience. In the left ring: my [Evan pauses, spit-polishing his war monocle] years of league play in *Team Fortress Classic* and *Tribes*; 400 hours of *ArmA 2*. In the right circle: a shameful Bronze league *StarCraft II* ranking and a trail of unfinished save files for *Total War* and *X-COM*.

Frozen Synapse cares about both of these zones; it's a miracle middle-ground for those of us that seem to lose our intuition when transitioning from an FPS to a turn-based game. *Frozen Synapse* relies as much on my instincts about positioning and timing as it does my (limited) strategic wit.

READ ME
PUBLISHER Mode 7 Games
DEVELOPER Mode 7 Games
LINK www.frozensynapse.com

I'm instantly wooed as I score my first kill with explosives. I order my grenadier, who's at the bottom hallway of a T-shaped intersection, to bounce a 'nade off a wall straight ahead. I do this by carefully drawing a trajectory for the shot—like you might click-drag a line in Photoshop. As the next turn plays out, my grenade bounces down the hall to the left and splatters the enemy around the corner. It's such a familiar feeling—it's the same empowering buzz of luck, timing and intuition that I get in *Counter-Strike* when I plink a hand grenade blindly down a hallway in cs_office and net a kill.

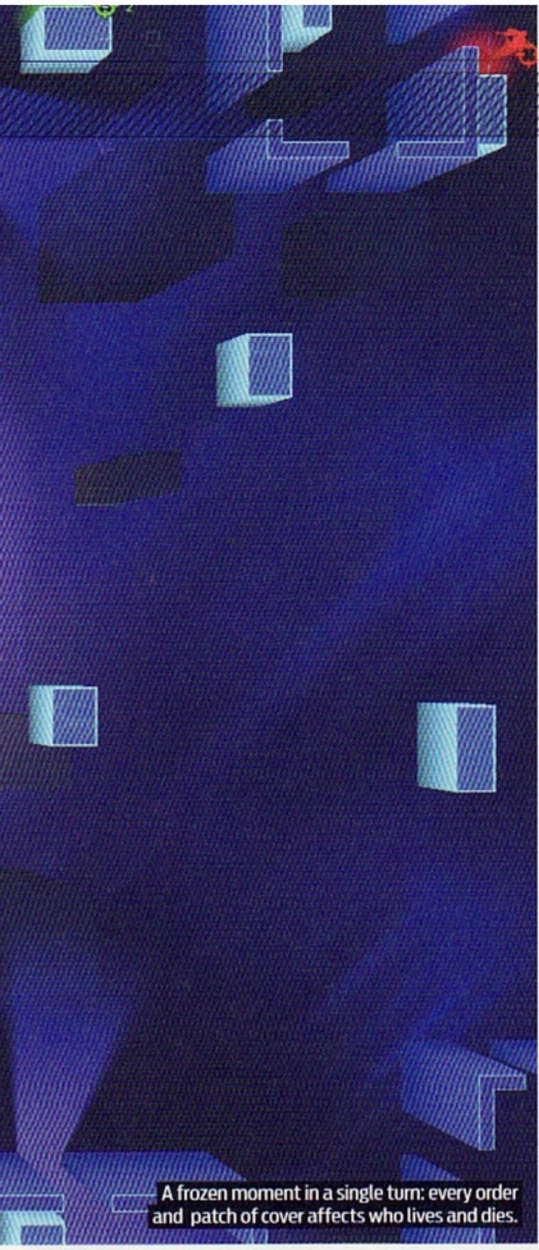
Its rock-paper-scissors simplicity is satisfyingly mathematical.

Like *CS*, *Synapse* is a game of angles and anticipation. There's no economy, equipment menu, experience points or fog of war to worry about—just a pile of men with guns stuffed inside a maze of walls for you to fling death at. You're a tactician, controlling a handful of machine-gunners, shotgunners, rocketmen and snipers in a top-down, abstracted floorplan. You plan out a turn by creating a movement path (click-dragging waypoints) and aim orders (telling a unit to point their weapon in a specific direction to spot an enemy). Then, you hit a button that executes both you and your enemy's orders simultaneously and see what happens.

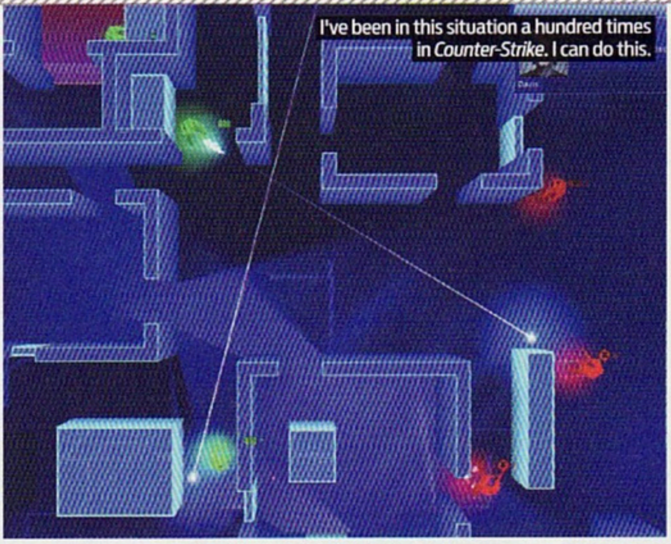
"Simultaneous turn-based strategy" is the name for it; imagine a chess game where—instead of alternating turns—you can move any and all of your pawns, rooks and other pieces in any single turn but your opponent can do the same.

Slow and steady

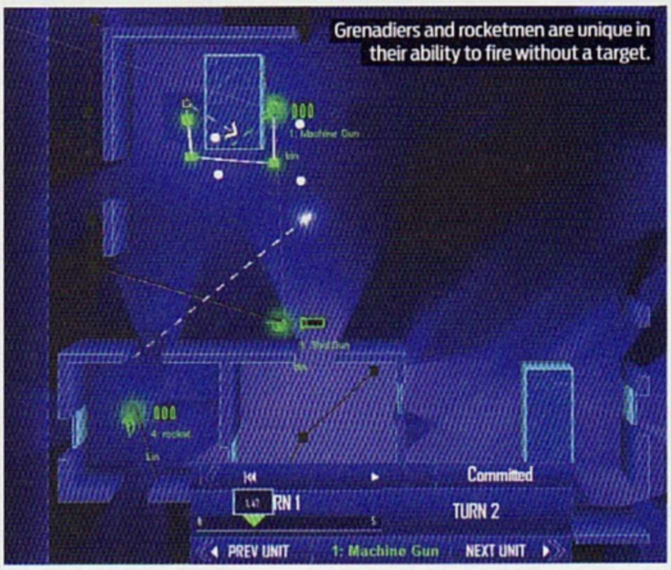
Synapse takes that system a step further by simplifying units down to barebones abstractions of soldiers. Your units are soulless clones—a rocketman is essen-



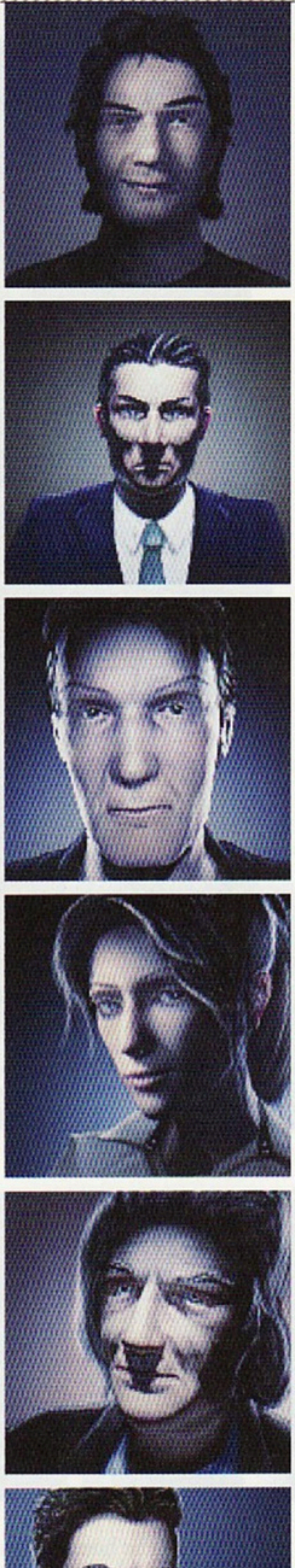
A frozen moment in a single turn: every order and patch of cover affects who lives and dies.



I've been in this situation a hundred times in *Counter-Strike*. I can do this.



Grenadiers and rocketmen are unique in their ability to fire without a target.



Hackers, operators, conspirators —these are the faces of *Synapse*.

tially an RPG with a body attached to it. And while I love nurturing a set of soldiers over time with experience points or equipment in games like *X-COM* and *Jagged Alliance*, *Synapse*'s rock-paper-scissors simplicity is satisfyingly mathematical. When your machinegunner opens up on an enemy, the only factors in play are range, vision and cover.

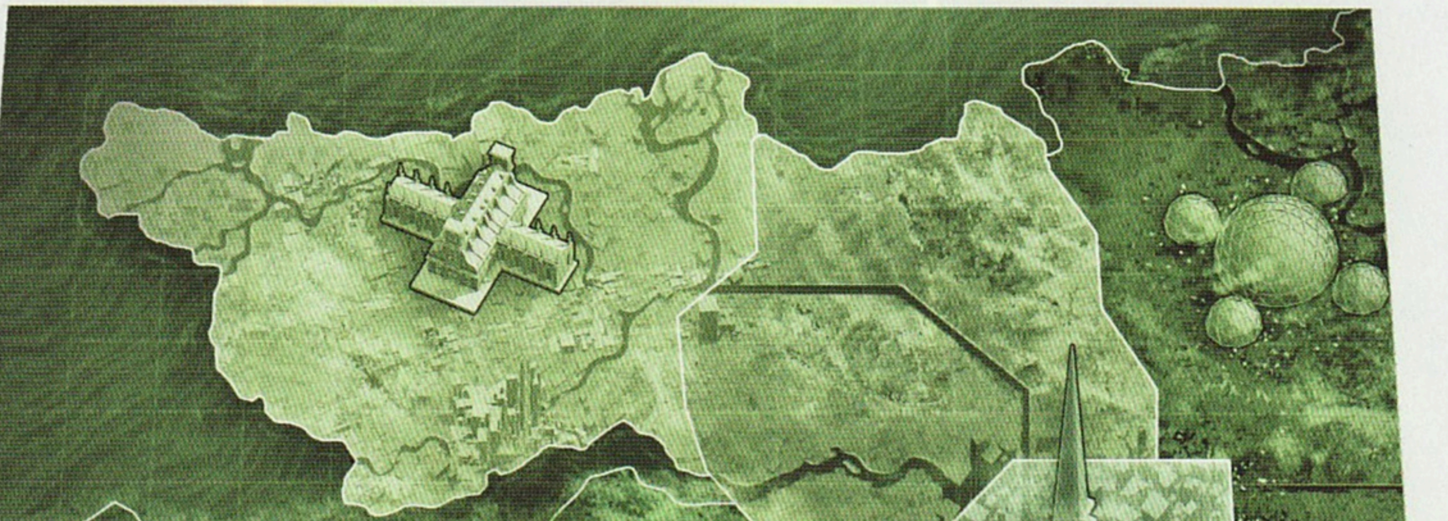
In one mission, I have to escort three AI-controlled scientists from the left side of the map to the right side, covering their escape. After two attempts, I finally grind out a win by patiently programming my units. I turtle my shotgunner in a corner and give him only a narrow angle to look through—a windowsill where he'll have a clear shot at any passers-by. He buckshots two enemies in the spine. I tell my machinegunner to watch north for half of his turn, then backpedal south while aiming to the west, and he tags two more enemies before being lobotomized by a sniper.

Conspiracy central

The storytelling that binds this less-is-more strategy together is actually very complex. *Synapse* is set in a near-future where a new sort of augmented reality network called "The Shape" is widely used—like a reborn internet—as a form of communication and business. This is where it gets a little *Matrixy*. "Humans are able to use The Shape for their own purposes, but it's also home to unique incorporeal lifeforms, known as 'shapeforms,'" Mode 7's writer, audio and marketing man Paul Taylor explains.

"The player encounters several factions throughout the city, all of whom are opposed to the corporate group controlling The Shape, but have their own differing ideologies." One of these groups is The Blue Sunlight Foundation, "a religious organization whose creed states that the city is a key component in the 'Omega Point,' an end-of-the-world scenario in which all matter contracts to a single point with infinite mass," Taylor says. They probably throw a hell of an ice cream social.

In the missions I played, Mode 7 showed incredible restraint in limiting this complex exposition to fast, introductory chatter between characters that act as your operators during each mission. But as such, I never got a mental foothold on exactly what The Shape was, who I was fighting or what elaborate conspiracy I was trying to foil. Admittedly, most of



The between-mission map screen, revealed here for the first time, highlights mission locations and acts as a hub for reading dossiers and chatting up characters for story details.

the plot will be housed at the between-mission map, which I saw less of.

I do wish that *Synapse*'s barebones visuals could carry more of the burden of its story. As an art style, it's almost contextless, which certainly helps it clearly represent the movement and combat orders you issue to troops, but it doesn't convey any flavor of the world you're playing in.

Gameplay first

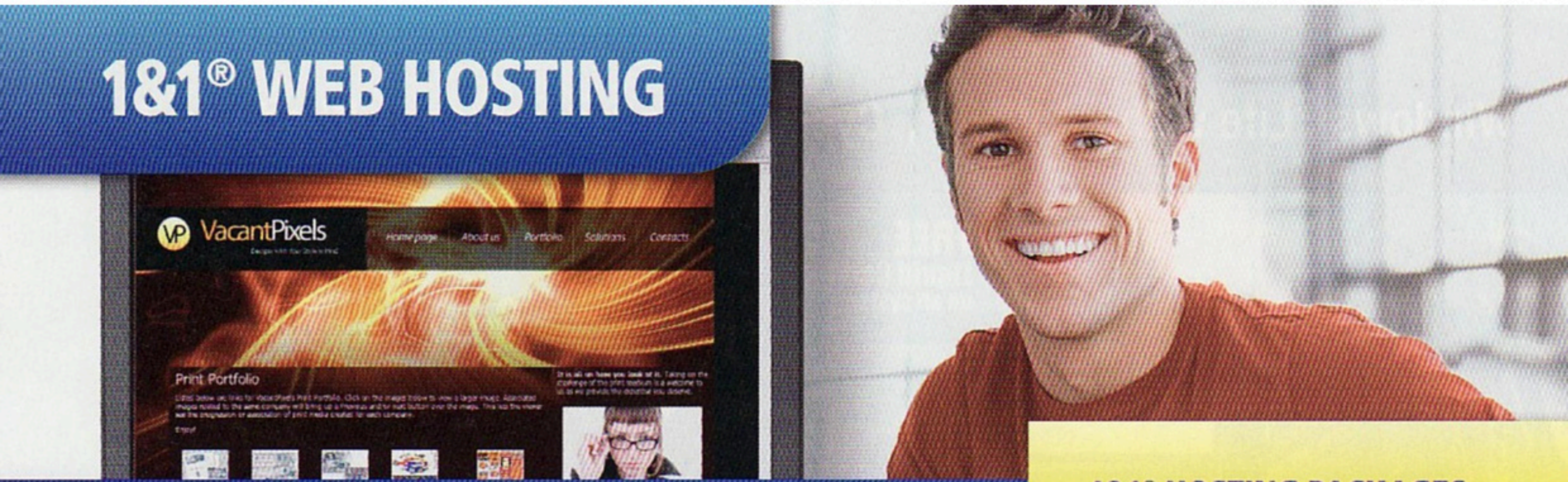
If *Ghost in the Shell*-style corporate conspiracies are your thing, you'll eat the story up, but *Synapse* is driven by its gameplay more than its plot. The map layouts in single-player are randomized, meaning you can't beat any mission with a single "puzzle" solution, which I love.

There's also a foolproof random scenario generator that cranks out limitless skirmishes against the AI and fully-featured online multiplayer. *Synapse*'s rules, readability and unintimidating depth make it a refreshing strategy entry; the *Counter-Strike* player in me loves that every mission is about the same length of a multiplayer FPS match—between four and 10 minutes. ■

Evan Lahti

Release JUNE

1&1® WEB HOSTING



PROFESSIONAL WEBSITES

As the world's largest web host, we know the developer features you need in a hosting package!

.com
.info .org
.net

Domains Included
All hosting packages include domains, free for the life of your package.

Unlimited Traffic
Unlimited traffic to all websites in your 1&1 hosting package.

Developer Features
Extensive language support with PHP 5/6 (beta) with Zend Framework and git version management software.

Online Marketing Tools
SEO tools to optimize your website.
1&1 Webstatistics makes it easy to monitor your progress.

NEW! Now offering .ca domains to our Canadian customers. C$9.99/first year.* Visit www.1and1.ca for details.

1&1® HOSTING PACKAGES 6 MONTHS FREE!*

OFFER ENDS 4/30/11

1&1® BUSINESS PACKAGE:

- 3 Included Domains
- Private Domain Registration
- 250 GB Web Space
- UNLIMITED Traffic
- NEW: Version Management Software (git)
- 2,500 E-mail Accounts
- 50 MySQL Database
- 25 FTP Accounts
- E-mail Marketing Tool
- 24/7 Toll-free Customer Support

~~$9.99 per month*~~ ~~C$9.99~~

Need more domains?

.info domain only $0.99/first year*
.com domain only $4.99/first year*

More special offers available on our website!

1&1®

MEMBER OF united internet

1-877-GO-1AND1 www.1and1.com
1-855-CA-1AND1 www.1and1.ca

*Offers valid through 4/30/2011. 12 month minimum contract term applies for web hosting offers. Setup fee and other terms and conditions may apply. Domain offers valid first year only. After first year, standard pricing applies. Visit www.1and1.com for full promotional offer details. Program and pricing specifications and availability subject to change without notice. 1&1 and the 1&1 logo are trademarks of 1&1 Internet AG, all other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. © 2011 1&1 Internet, Inc. All rights reserved.

Windows®. Life without Walls™, CyberPower recommends Windows 7

FREE Liquid Cooling on all systems

Gamer Infinity 8800 Pro SE

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

- Asus® Sabertooth X58 USB3.0 & SATA 3 Mainboard
- Corsair® 12GB DDR3 1333 Triple Channel Memory
- Kingston 30GB SSD(Boot) + 2TB SATA III DATA HDD
- Nvidia® Geforce® GTX 570 1.2GB Direct X 11 Video
- AZZA Hurrican 2000 Full Tower Case 800 Watt Power

Asetek Liquid Cooling System

Nvidia® 3D Vision Glass and LCD + $499

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7 (8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)

Extreme i7-990X 3.33Ghz	$ 2265
i7-970 3.20Ghz	$ 1789
i7-960 3.20Ghz	$ 1485
i7-950 3.20Ghz	$ 1469

From **$1469**

Cyber POWER Inc. YOUR UNLIMITED GAMING SOLUTIONS

Unleash THE POWER

Gamer Xtreme XT

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

- Asus® Sabertooth X58 USB3.0 & SATA 3 Mainboard
- Corsair® 6GB DDR3 1333 Triple Channel Memory
- 2TB SATA-III 6.0 7200 RPM HD 32MB Cache
- Nvidia® GeForce® GTX 460 1GB Direct X 11 Video Card
- Inwin Dragon Rider Full Tower Case with 600 Watt Power

Asetek Liquid Cooling System

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7 (8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)

Extreme i7-990X 3.33Ghz	$ 1869
i7-970 3.20Ghz	$ 1389
i7-960 3.20Ghz	$ 1079
i7-950 3.20Ghz	$ 1075

DVD 24X±RW · HD 7.1 600 W · Xtreme Gear · Xtreme Gear · FREE Liquid Cooling · 3D Vision Ready

From **$1075**

NVIDIA®, nForce®, GeForce®, SLI™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. CyberPower PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows® • www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell

DVD 24X±RW
HD 7.1 600 W
Xtreme Gear
Xtreme Gear
FREE Liquid Cooling
3D Vision Ready

Gamer Xtreme 1000

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

Asus® H61 Chipset Motherboard

Corsair® 4GB DDR3 1333 Dual Channel Memory

1TB SATA-II 3.0 7200 RPM HD 16MB Cache

Nvidia® GeForce® GTS 550 1GB Video Card

Raidmax Blade Gaming Case 450 Watt

Asetek Liquid Cooling System

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)	
	i7-2600K 3.4Ghz	$ 855
	i7-2600 3.40Ghz	$ 835
i5	i5-2500K 2.80Ghz	$ 745
	i5-2500 3.20Ghz	$ 735
	i5-2400 3.20Ghz	$ 719
	i5-2300 3.20Ghz	$ 709
i3	i3-2100 3.20Ghz	$ 599

From **$599**

DVD 24X±RW
HD 7.1 600 W
Xtreme Gear
Xtreme Gear
FREE Liquid Cooling
3D Vision Ready

Gamer Xtreme 2000

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

Asus® P8H67M LX P67 Chipset Mainboard

Corsair® 8GB DDR3 1333 Dual Channel Memory

1TB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 16MB Cache Ultra Fast HD

ATI Radeon™ HD 5770 1GB Video Card

Apevia X-Dreamer 3 Gaming Case with 600 Watt CrossFire Power

Asetek Liquid Cooling System

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)	
	i7-2600K 3.4hz	$ 995
	i7-2600 3.4Ghz	$ 969
i5	i5-2500K 2.80Ghz	$ 885
	i5-2500 2.80Ghz	$ 869
	i5-2400 3.20Ghz	$ 855
	i5-2300 3.20Ghz	$ 845
i3	i3-2100 3.20Ghz	$ 759

From **$759**

DVD 24X±RW
HD 7.1 600 W
Xtreme Gear
Xtreme Gear
FREE Liquid Cooling

Gamer Xtreme 3000

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

Asus® P8P67M P67 Chipset Mainboard w/ USB 3.0 & SATA III

Corsair® 8GB DDR3 1333 Triple Channel Memory

2TB S ATA-III 3.0 7200 RPM HD 16MB Cache

Nvidia® Geforce® GTX 560 TI 1 GB Direct X 11 Video

CoolerMaster HAF 912 Gaming Tower Case with 700 Watt Power

Asetek Liquid Cooling System

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)	
	i7-2600K 3.4hz	$ 1149
	i7-2600 3.4Ghz	$ 1125
i5	i5-2500K 2.80Ghz	$ 1039
	i5-2500 2.80Ghz	$ 1029
	i5-2400 3.20Ghz	$ 1015
	i5-2300 3.20Ghz	$ 999
i3	i3-2100 3.20Ghz	$ 915

From **$915**

Order Toll Free All Desktop systems come with 3 year Limited Warranty + lifetime toll free techsupport

800-707-0393 www.cyberpowerpc.com

Gamer Xplorer X6-9200

Intel® Core™ i3 2310M Processor

Intel® HM65 Chipset
802.11 A/G/N Wireless Network

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

8GB DDR3 PC1333 Memory

500GB SATA150 Hard Drive

15.6" Full HD 1920 X 1080

Intel UDMA 3D Video Display

1000/100/10 Network Card

Free Carrying Case

1x HDMI
1x VGA Port
2x USB 3.0
5 hr
5.4 Lbs
DVD 8X±RW
7 in 1 Media Reader
Built-in

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	2920XM	$1665
	2820QM	$1139
	2630QM	$775
i5	2410M	$725
i3	2310M	$655

From **$655**

Gamer Xplorer X6-9600

Intel® Core™ i3 2310M Processor

Intel® HM65 Chipset
802.11 A/G/N Wireless Network

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition Service Pack 1

8GB DDR3 PC1333 Memory

500GB SATA150 Hard Drive

15.6" Full HD 1920 X 1080

Nvidia® Geforce® 5400M 2GB Direct X 11 Video Card

1000/100/10 Network Card

Free Carrying Case

1x HDMI
1x VGA Port
1x USB 3.0
2x USB 2.0
4 hr
DVD 8X±RW
3 in 1 Media Card
Built-in
5.5 Lbs

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

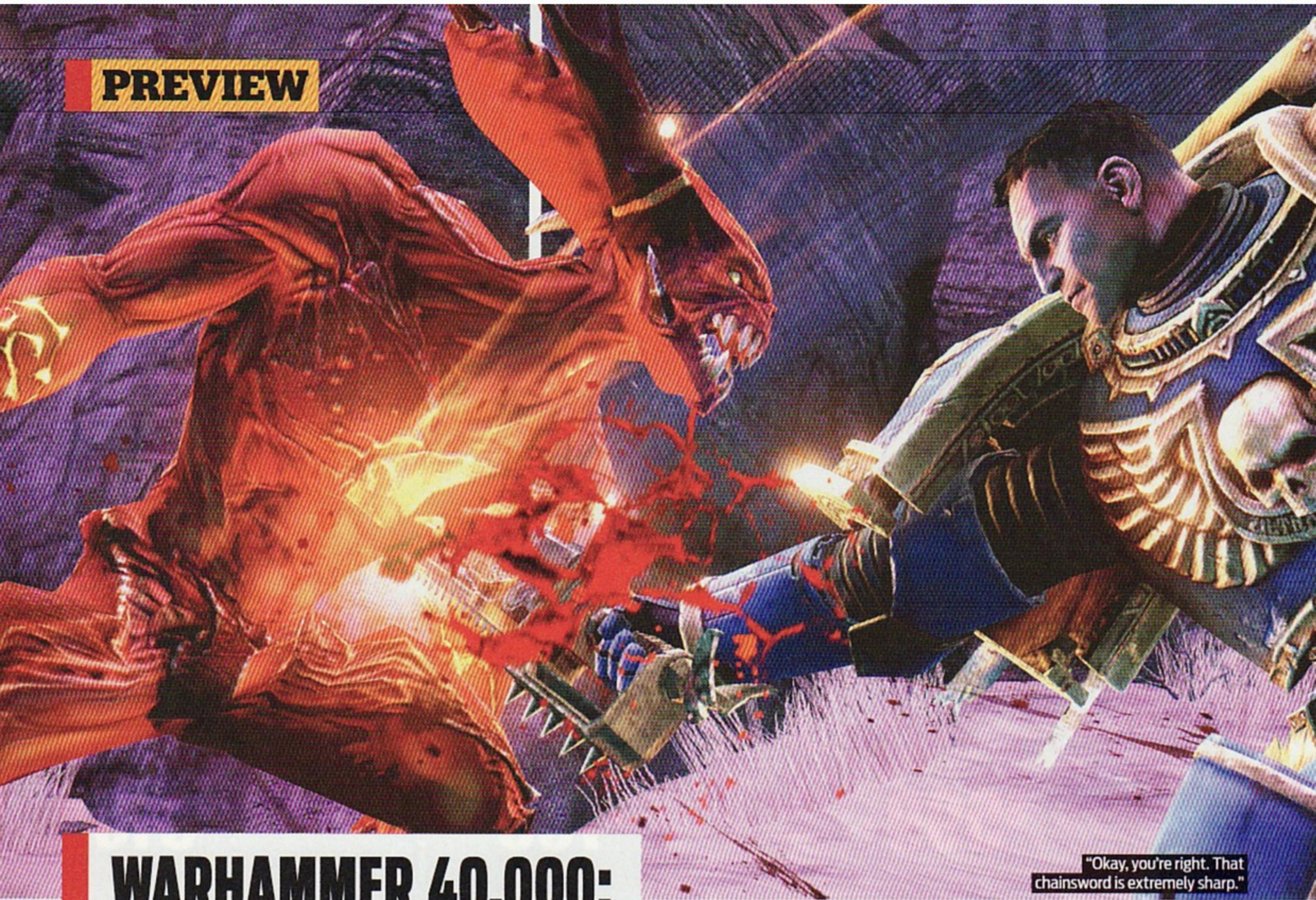
i7	2920XM	$1899
	2820QM	$1375
	2630QM	$995
i5	2410M	$955
i3	2310M	$869

From **$889**

intel inside™
CORE™ i7
Visibly Smart
NEW

CyberPOWER Inc.

Celeron, Celeron Inside, Centrino, Centrino Inside, Centrino Logo,Core Inside, Intel, Intel Logo, Intel Core, Intel Inside, Intel Inside Logo, Intel Viiv, Intel vPro, Itanium, Itanium Inside, Pentium, Pentium Inside, Viiv Inside, vPro Inside, Xeon, and Xeon Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries.
All prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. CyberPower is not responsible for any typographical and photographic errors. Copyright ©2010 CyberPower. All rights reserved.



"Okay, you're right. That chainsword is extremely sharp."

WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE

HANDS-ON "Quit yer cowerin' behind cover—you're a Space Marine now!"

Weighing in at 1,000 pounds, seven feet tall, cybernetically and genetically enhanced and encased in ceramite armor, Captain Titus of the Ultramarines is a living weapon of the Imperium of Man, and he's here to set the record straight. *Dawn of War II* taught PC gamers that cover is a precious commodity; in *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine*, cover is for cowards.

My hands-on with *Space Marine* begins with the requisite band of grunts surrounded behind enemy lines and in need of a savior. Beneath the war-torn gothic spires of a human forge world that's been invaded by a million-ork army, Captain Titus answers the distress call. Thinking I know how a Space Marine ought to fight from *DoW2*, I make my way down a shattered strip of pavement, wary of any sudden moves and ready to leap for cover. Kak-kak-kak! "Ambush!" I pop-off a few suppressing rounds and weave back and forth toward the protection of an iron derelict. Wait—there's no key to stick myself to cover? Suddenly vulnerable, my crosshair fumbles over the approaching horde, sending a haphazard spray of bullets on an aimless journey. By the time I realize a tactical advance isn't on the menu, the greenskins have me surrounded. They make quick work of my inexplicably helmetless skull.

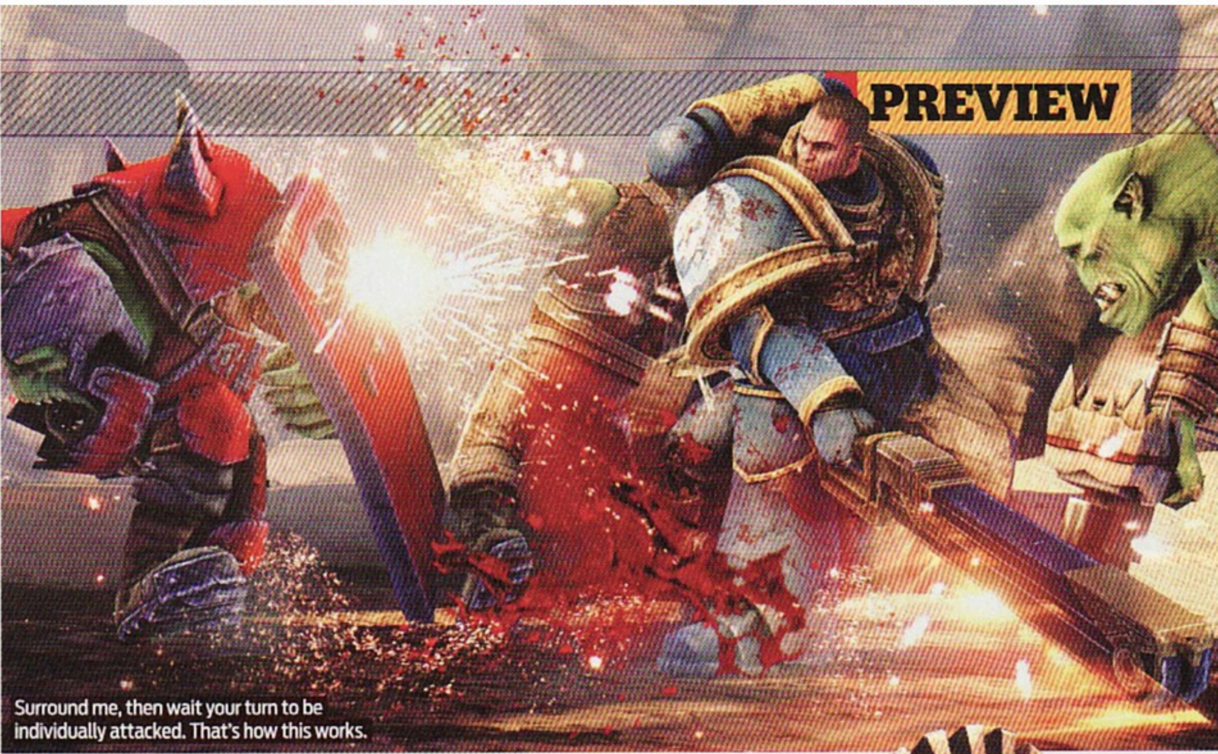
READ ME
PUBLISHER THQ
DEV Relic
LINK www.spacemarine.com

My bolter pops three orks like overripe tomatoes stuffed with firecrackers.

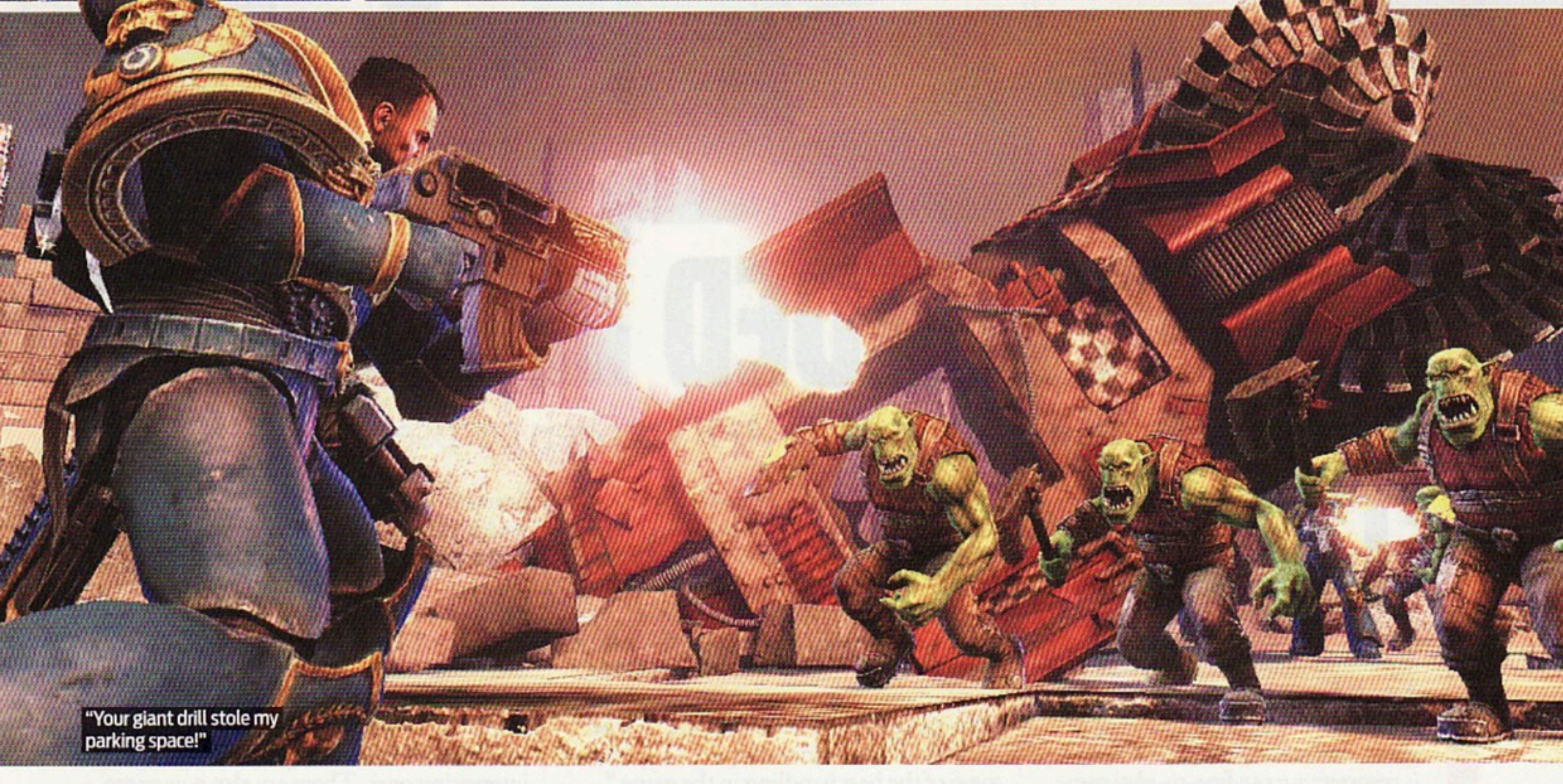
The failure is due in large part to my lack of creativity. As I've done in countless other shooters, I lunged toward the nearest hip-high wall at the first sign of hot lead. But Space Marines don't take cover, they destroy it. Game Director Raphael van Lierop: "we're trying to get players to accept a new way of fighting…a Space Marine wants to be in the thick of an intense battle…That's where you get the glorious brutality."

Adeptus Barbarus

I'm less cautious on my second try. I bull-rush forward in a cascade of spent shells; as soon as my enemies are close enough, my bolter pops three orks like overripe tomatoes stuffed with firecrackers. I whirl, downing a couple more, then slice through three whiny, Gretchen mini-orks like butter with my chainsword. I'm low on health and there's still an elite unit to deal with, but the green blood I just shed has boosted my fury



Surround me, then wait your turn to be individually attacked. That's how this works.



"Your giant drill stole my parking space!"

meter, allowing an execution move that forces the brute to his knees while I swoop behind for a gruesome decapitation that replenishes some of my health. In an exhilarating 60 seconds, my armor is smattered with gore and I'm surrounded by corpses. "Such is the fate of the enemies of man!"

Typically a level design taboo, the cramped sewer and factory I end up in force a balancing act of ranged and melee attacks to deal with threats at multiple distances simultaneously. Unfortunately, the satisfying cadence of combat with orks is lost when I face Bloodletters—teleporting demons that dodge attacks by warping every few seconds. Their guerilla tactics have me gracelessly flailing at puffs of smoke. They're more a nuisance than a threat.

I spent the first half of my hands-on reeling from the fact that *Space Marine* isn't what I thought it was. There are no squad or RPG mechanics to speak of, and that's disappointing considering the seamless way *DoW2* integrated design from other genres into its RTS core. Taken for the character action game that it is, however, *Space Marine* has that fast combat we've been missing on the PC. Not to mention the sickening thwunk of a charged plasma pistol separating an ork from his gray matter. "Uh, Captain, I think you've got a bit of eyeball on your chin there." ■

Robert Hathorne

Release AUGUST

If the cars handle as well as they explode, *Reloaded* has a chance.

It isn't *APB*'s character customization that needs fixing.

Cops and robbers online was always a great concept.

APB RELOADED

FIRST LOOK Is there a spark of life in *APB*'s broken corpse?

"The biggest issues were balance, progression, missions, shooting and driving." For a game almost exclusively about shooting, driving, missions and progression, that's a fairly damning statement. I'd only asked *APB Reloaded*'s Jon-Enee Merriex to name one problem with Realtime Worlds' game, the bones of which GamersFirst is resurrecting as a free-to-play game.

Merriex qualifies his words: "Those parts weren't *terrible*. They just didn't add up. The 'feel' of the game wasn't right." As producer on *APB Reloaded*, it's these floaty concepts that he and his team are focusing on. "We have no interest in creating a new game from scratch, or a direct copy of some other game. Old players will log back in and find the game they loved, just spruced up a *lot*."

READ ME
PUBLISHER K2
DEVELOPER GamersFirst
LINK www.gamersfirst.com/apb

Zak Littwin—ex-QA lead for Realtime Worlds and now lead designer on the reboot: "Now when you turn, your vehicle turns instantly, instead of taking a second for the wheels to move before the car does. We've also given each vehicle its own unique handling."

Merriex doesn't miss a chance to lambast the original *APB*. "Various basic decisions simply didn't make sense to us, like giving players a crap starter car." Players now get the keys to a two-door coupe. "They have some of the best handling in the game," explains Littwin.

As for shooting, both aim and camera positioning have been tweaked, bringing the game closer to a standard shooter in weight. "We've also adjusted recoil and weapon balance, as well as changed the upgrade system so both guns and vehicles can only have one upgrade of a certain category at a time," says Littwin. This could potentially prevent top-level players wielding weaponry orders of magnitude better than their noobish peers, but whether that'll work when players pay for item rental remains to be seen.

> **"Instead of adding hundreds of new missions, we're focusing on a few interesting ones."**

Next on Littwin's laundry list of overhauls: missions—originally just a case of driving to a place and pressing F on a thing. "Instead of adding hundreds of new missions, we're focusing on adding a few interesting ones. There are also new game modes, like Bank Heist, Turf War, and DJ Battle." Completing missions will create meaningful progression: *Reloaded*'s aim is "purposeful end-game PvP." Players will be split into districts, with sectors that Jon-Enee describes as "buckets" that house different skill levels. Lower-skill players can jump up a level to join their chums, but predatory monsters can't dip into lower buckets to have their fill of noobs.

I'm not sure whether they'll be able to lure back players burnt by the game the first time around, but at least they've identified the biggest problems and are launching themselves at them, face-first. ■

Rich McCormick

Release WINTER 2011

RELEASE METER

3 MONTHS AWAY

TORCHLIGHT II

While *Diablo*'s away, the *Torchlight* we'll play. The addictive, now four-player click-clicky swordplay and spellcasting may just make you forget all about that big red demon.

Release JULY

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

After 11 long years, it's nearly time to see what Eidos has conjured up in the sequel to the best game of all time. Luckily, we installed patience augmentations.

Release AUGUST 23

ALICE: MADNESS RETURNS

American McGee's no fool: he knows it's time to expand the universe of his most popular game. Expect more of the twisted weirdness that made the original so great.

Release JUNE 14

F.E.A.R. 3

Ever wanted to moonlight as a cannibal? The new co-op mode lets you possess and force-choke cloned enemies as the ghost of the villainous Paxton Fettel.

Release MAY 24

6 MONTHS AWAY

TOMB RAIDER

Gaming's best female lead is getting rebooted. This prequel finds a younger, more fleshed-out Lara (as it were) traipsing around an island riddled with hostile inhabitants and creatures.

Release Q4 2011

DOTA 2

The biggest threat to the current MOBA market is almost ready to be unveiled. Let's hope the combo of Valve and IceFrog can top the titanic popularity of the original, legendary mod.

Release Q4 2011

TRIBES: ASCEND

Tribes is back (no doubt due to our nightly prayers) in this multiplayer-only reboot using the Unreal 3 engine. We can't wait to jetpack around maps like the Rocketeer, enemy flag in hand.

Release Q4 2011

STAR WARS: TOR

None of this "Alliance or Horde" nonsense—it's time to choose between the light and dark sides of the force. You can bet we've got our lightsabers and blasters at the ready.

Release Q3 2011

9+ MONTHS AWAY

BLADE & SOUL

Details on NCsoft's Korean MMO are as scant as the clothing on the game's women, but what we've seen so far of its combat and gorgeous graphics has definitely snared our attention.

Release TBD

BIOSHOCK: INFINITE

With Ken Levine and the rest of Irrational Games back in the driver's seat, we're getting hyped to go zip-lining from blimp-to-blimp in this old-timey Cloud City.

Release 2012

STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM

Whether you want to know what happens with Kerrigan or you welcome fresh multi-player units, the expansion to last year's blockbuster RTS can't come soon enough.

Release 2012

SERIOUS SAM 3: BFE

Ever since mowing down our first stampede of skeletal Kleers, we've been hooked on Sam's run-'n'-gun goofiness. The latest installment brings the comical mayhem to a modern-day setting.

Release 2012

ON YOUR RADAR THE TOP 13 MOST-ANTICPATED PC GAMES

1. **DIABLO III ▶▶**
2. STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC
3. GUILD WARS 2
4. DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION
5. DUKE NUKEM FOREVER
6. THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM
7. BATTLEFIELD 3

"I don't think it will deliver enough of a narrative to keep me interested beyond the clicking."
—*@Flameinc, from Twitter*

"I'm in it for the rainbows, mostly."
—*@dailyblink, from Twitter*

8. THE LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH
9. NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT 2
10. MASS EFFECT 3
11. BIOSHOCK: INFINITE
12. BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
13. MAX PAYNE 3

Source: Ipsos OTX GamePLan Insights. Top titles based on purchase intent are collected via a weekly tracking study of 1,000 active gamers in the US between the ages of 13-59. Since launching in 2008, GamePlan has collected data on over 100,000 gamers across 2,500+ titles.

BEST GUESS

DOOM 4

The brains at id aren't content to release *Rage* and go back into game development hibernation for a few more years. This new entry, which appears unrelated to past games in the series, will run on id's homegrown id Tech 5 engine. John Carmack has stated that development by the *Doom 4* team is well underway. We may see the game as soon as late 2012.

Windows®. Life without Walls™, CyberPower recommends Windows 7

Create the PC
of your dreams

AMD
The future is fusion

Order Toll Free
800-707-0393

Techsupport
All Desktop systems come with 3 year Limited Warranty + lifetime toll free techsupport

FREE
Liquid Cooling
on all systems

ATI RADEON GRAPHICS

AMD Phenom II X6

AMD 790X Chipset

AMD Phenom™ II processors deliver maximum headroom, for The Ultimate Visual Experience™ for HD gaming and entertainment with the innovation to accelerate your performance.

www.cyberpowerpc.com

CyberPOWER Inc.

X6 Hex-core Processor
AMD Phenom™ II

1100T CPU (Black Edition)	$ 1235
1090T CPU	$ 1199
1075T CPU	$ 1189
1055T CPU	$ 1175

X2 Dual-core Processor
AMD Athlon™ II

255 CPU	$ 1035

X4 Quad-core Processor
AMD Phenom™ II

965 CPU (Black Edition)	$ 1155
955 CPU	$ 1135

12X Blu-ray Player + DVDRW
AMD 7.1 600 W
FREE Liquid Cooling
Xtreme Gear® Keyboard
Xtreme Gear® Optical Mouse

GAMER DRAGON 9000

Windows 7 Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium 64 Bit Edition Service Pack 1

Asus® M4A87TD EVO AMD 870 USB 3.0 & SATA 3 Mainboard
Corsair® 8GB DDR3-1333 Dual Channel Memory
Kingston 30GB SSD(Boot) +1TB SATA III DATA HDD
AMD Radeon™ HD6950 2GB Direct X 11 video
COOLERMASTER 690 II Advance Gaming Case 700 Watt Power
Asetek Liquid Cooling System

$1035

X6 Hex-core Processor
AMD Phenom™ II

1100T CPU (Black Edition)	$ 925
1090T CPU	$ 889
1055T CPU	$ 869

X2 Dual-core Processor
AMD Athlon™ II

265 CPU	$ 745

X4 Quad-core Processor
AMD Phenom™ II

970 CPU (Black Edition)	$ 869
965 CPU (Black Edition)	$ 845
840 CPU	$ 779

DVD 24X±RW
AMD 7.1 600 W
FREE Liquid Cooling
Xtreme Gear® Keyboard
Xtreme Gear® Optical Mouse

GAMER DRAGON 8000

Windows 7 Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium 64 Bit Edition Service Pack 1

Asus® M4A87TD EVO AMD 870 USB 3.0 & SATA 3 Mainboard
Corsair® 8GB DDR3-1333 Dual Channel Memory
1TB S ATA-III 6.0 7200 RPM HD 32MB Cache
AMD Radeon™ HD6850 1GB Direct X 11 Video Card
Xion Predator 970 Tower Case w/ 600 Watt Power
Asetek Liquid Cooling System

$745

X6 Hex-core Processor
AMD Phenom™ II

1100T CPU (Black Edition)	$ 709
1090T CPU	$ 675
1075T CPU	$ 665
1055T CPU	$ 649

X2 Dual-core Processor
AMD Athlon™ II

260 CPU	$ 515

X4 Quad-core Processor
AMD Phenom™ II

965 CPU (Black Edition)	$ 629
955 CPU	$ 609
840 CPU	$ 565

DVD 24X±RW
AMD 7.1 600 W
Xtreme Gear® Keyboard
Xtreme Gear® Optical Mouse
FREE Liquid Cooling

GAMER ULTRA 7000 ELITE

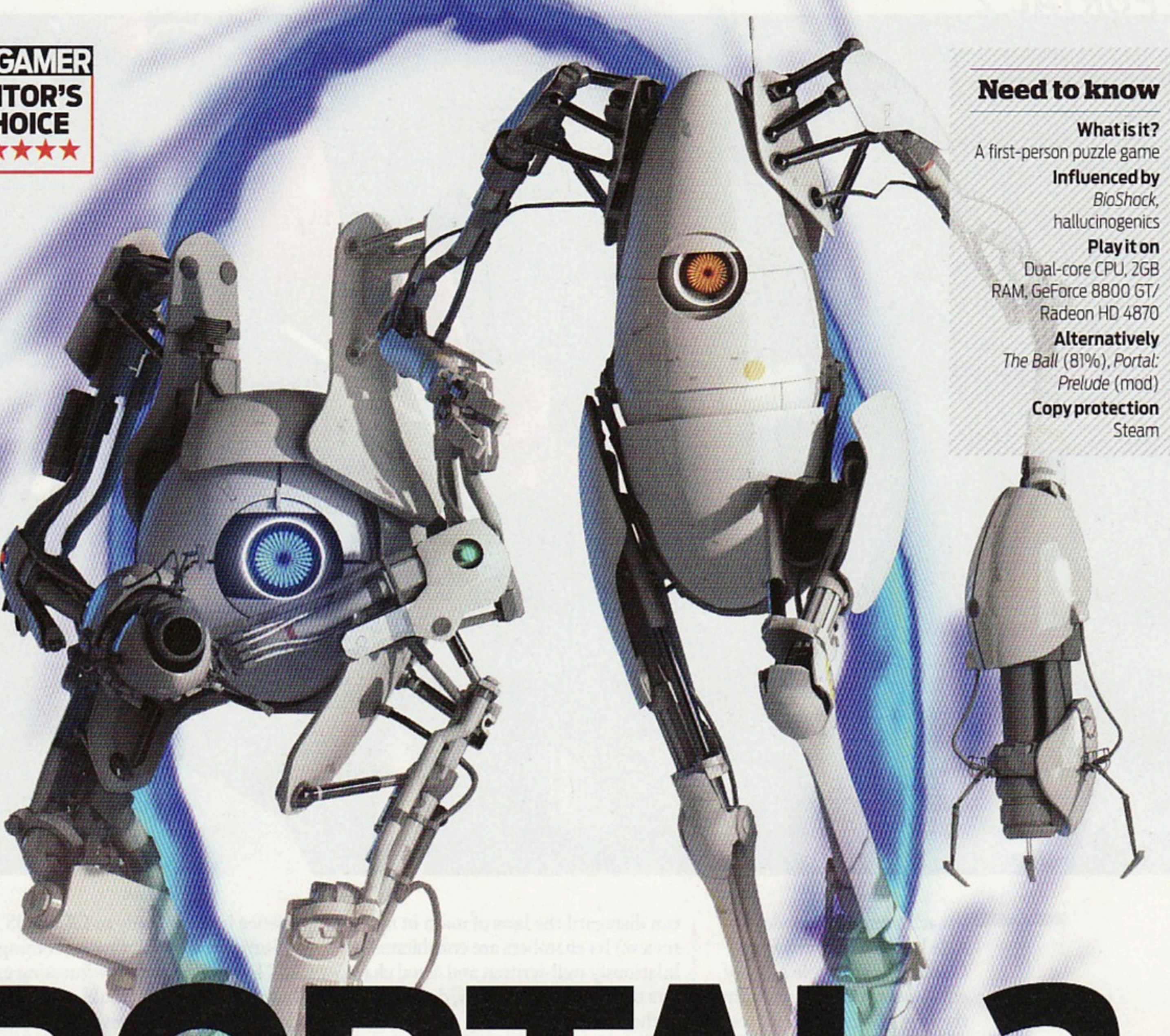
Windows 7 Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium 64 Bit Edition Service Pack 1

Gigabyte® M4A-770T-USB3 AMD 770 USB3.0 Mainboard
Corsair® 4GB DDR3-1333 Dual Channel Memory
1TB SATA-II 3.0 7200 RPM HD 16mb Cache
ATI Radeon™ HD5450 1GB Direct X 11 Video Card
CoolerMaster Elite 430 Mid-Tower Case 450 Watt
Asetek Liquid Cooling System

$515

AMD, the AMD Arrow logo, AMD Phenom™ II, AMD Phenom™ ATI Radeon™ Graphics, 790 Series, and combinations thereof are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. All prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. Cyberpower is not responsible for any typographical and photographic errors. Copyright ©2008 Cyberpower. All rights reserved. NVIDIA®, nForce®, GeForce®, SLI™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. CyberPower PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows® • www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell

PC GAMER
EDITOR'S CHOICE
★★★★★



Need to know

What is it?
A first-person puzzle game

Influenced by
BioShock, hallucinogenics

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GT/ Radeon HD 4870

Alternatively
The Ball (81%), *Portal: Prelude* (mod)

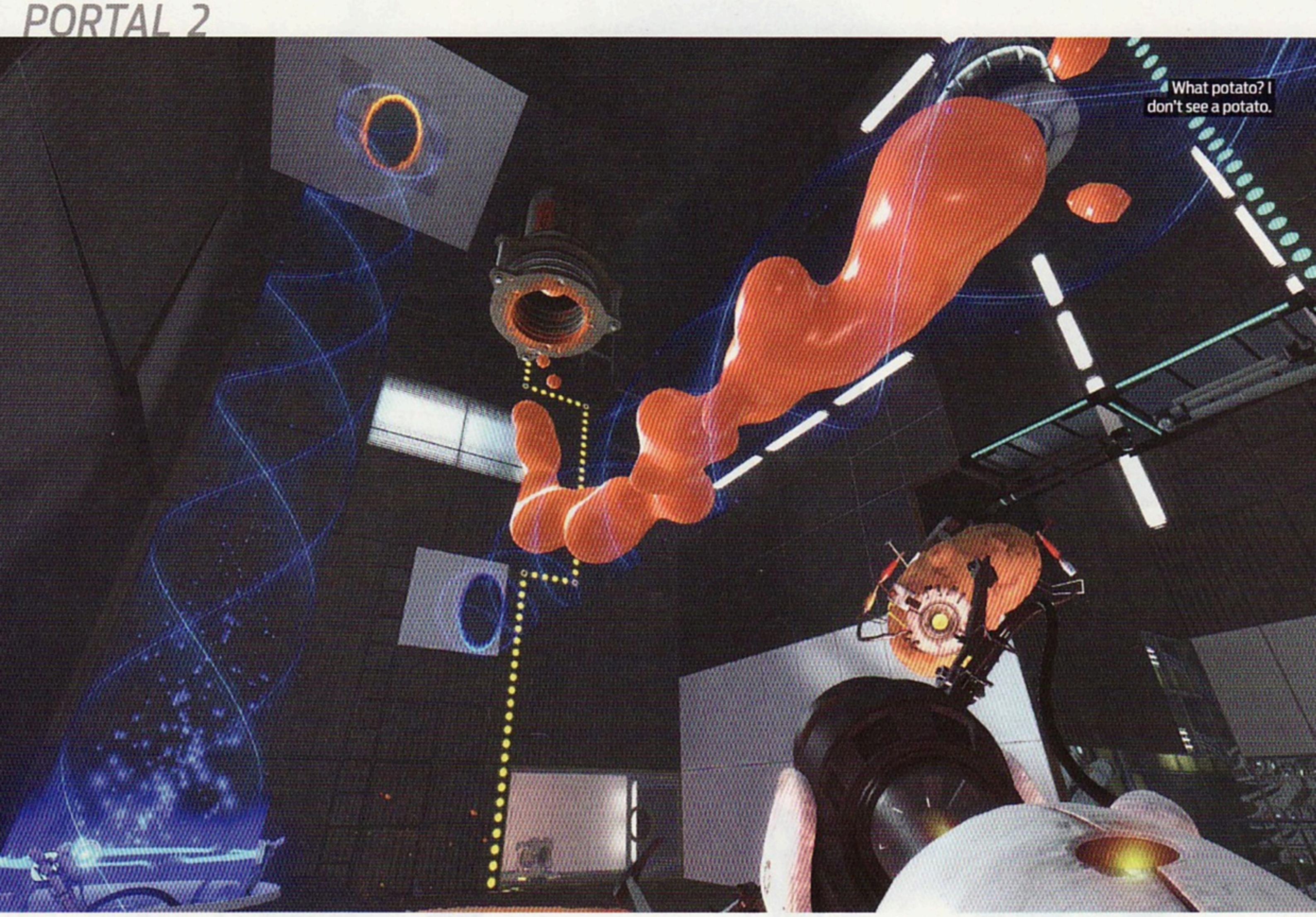
Copy protection
Steam

PORTAL 2

Valve's puzzler sequel punches you in the brain and makes you say "Thank you, may I have some more?" ***by Dan Stapleton [single-player] and Evan Lahti [co-op]***

I may be the dumbest genius ever. At least, that's how I feel after playing *Portal 2*'s fantastic single-player campaign. Many puzzles in the last third of the eight to 10 hours (perhaps less, depending on how clever you are) of its brain-bending puzzle "test chambers" had me convinced at one point or another that they were completely unsolvable, and that some bug or sadist game designer placed the exit just out of reach. I'd let out exasperated sighs as every attempt met with a dead end. I'd grimace in disapproval as I plummeted to my death for the tenth time. I'd consider surrender.

Then, through either sudden revelation, divine inspiration, or total accident, it would come to me: use the orange Propulsion Gel to reach the energy bridge, then catapult across the chasm and shift my blue portal to the inclined surface (in mid-air, mind you) to launch me up to the ledge, grab the refraction cube and redirect the laser beam to wipe out the turrets and activate the switch! It's so *simple*, I can't believe I didn't see it until now. One half of *Portal 2*'s brilliance is making me kick myself for not thinking of the impossible; the other is making me feel immensely satisfied with myself when I finally do, again and again.



What potato? I don't see a potato.

That achievement is made possible by the wondrous Portal Gun, the game's sole piece of equipment. Unchanged from the first game (except for some subtle but slick texture work and portals that can be seen through walls, *Left 4 Dead*-style) the easy-to-use gun reliably casts one orange portal and one blue portal against certain walls, allowing you to magically, instantaneously pass from one to the other, regardless of distance, obstacles, or line of sight, while preserving momentum. It's the ultimate non-weapon weapon, a sort of physics-based Judo-bazooka that redirects the strengths of energy and objects in motion toward its user's goals—including the user herself. Wielding it makes me feel more powerful—and smarter—than nearly any other gun in gaming.

The third half of *Portal 2*'s brilliance is its story. (Yes, third half. If Valve can disregard the laws of physics in its game, I can disregard the laws of math in my review.) Its chambers are cohabitated by hilariously well-written and acted characters that exude personality, despite none of them being technically people. All three major roles rattle off absurd dark humor and petty insults at every turn. Evil robot GLaDOS is in top politely murderous form right from the moment she appears on screen (spoiler alert: she's still alive!), but *Portal*'s show-stealing monotone antagonist is challenged for the spotlight by Wheatley, the bumbling, chattering robot who helps you escape.

Fantastically voiced by British actor Stephen Merchant (basically playing the same mind-bogglingly stupid character from the Ricky Gervais comedy *Extras*), Wheatley's a doofus AI who makes you turn around while he hacks doors (he can't do it while you're watching). Also in the mix is actor JK Simmons, who lends his fittingly cantankerous voice to the founder of Aperture, Cave Johnson, whose comically sociopathic approach to science is second only to GLaDOS'.

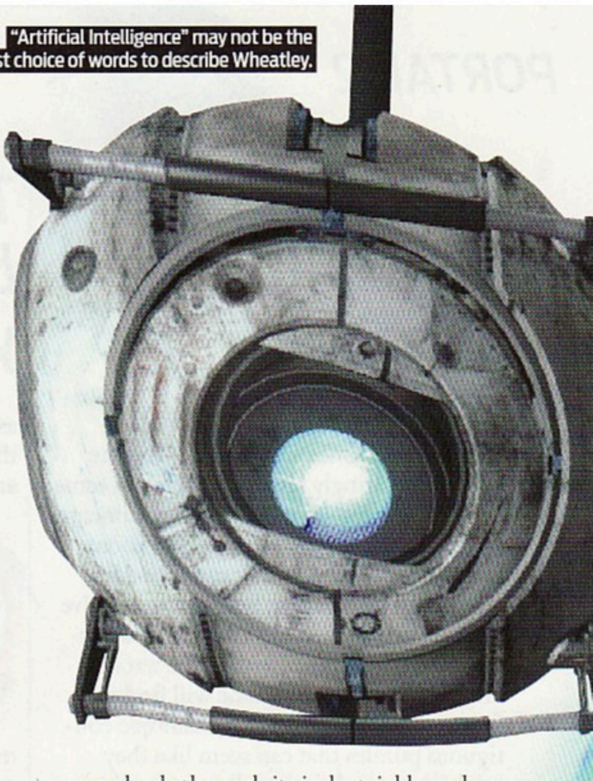
Sure, I saw the plot twists coming, but still looked forward to witnessing exactly how the characters would react. Through death, resurrection, revenge, and reversal of fortune, their charm makes what would otherwise be an empty and lifeless world feel boisterous and alive—and more than makes up for the player character being a faceless mute.

It does all this and more while recycling very few of *Portal*'s greatest comedy hits—there's nary a nod to dishonest cake, and the beloved Weighted Companion Cube makes only a cameo appearance. And the finale? Not challenging in the least, but a spectacular and extremely clever finish to the story, with extra points for those who've paid close attention to Mr. Johnson.

New dimensions

Without changing the nature of the established and celebrated gameplay, *Portal 2*'s gentle learning curve begins by reintroducing us to its basic concepts, then keeps on introducing new inventions to use with portals until around

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Valve Software ◆ **Developer** Valve Software ◆ **Multiplayer** 2-player co-op
◆ **Link** www.thinkwithportals.com ◆ **ESRB** E


"Artificial Intelligence" may not be the best choice of words to describe Wheatley.

Many of Aperture's once-spotless test chambers are now rusted, grimy and overgrown.

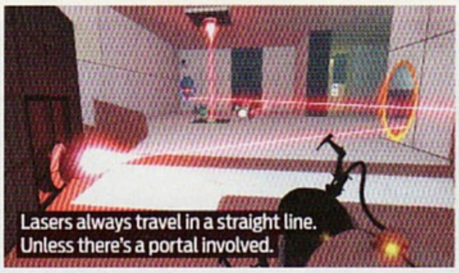
three quarters of the way through, and chambers become complex jungles of hazardous obstacles. Lasers emitting from walls combine with moveable Refractor Cubes to create the closest thing *Portal 2* has to an offensive weapon—an aimable laser—but more often your job is to focus the beam on trigger switches through portals. Infinitely useful Excursion Funnels (levitation beams) and Light Bridges are more than just here-to-there movers—they can be applied to block or push away turrets, halt a catapulting jump before it throws you into oblivion, or help you climb a sheer wall.

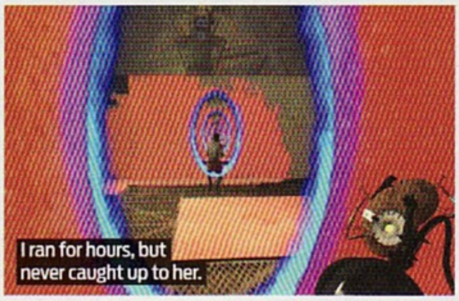
I'm a little less wowed by the three flavors of viscous gel, which flow with a hypnotic globular effect from spouts and coat the environment in bouncy, speedy, or portal-receptive ooze. Unlike most of *Portal 2*'s other devices, these have only a couple of uses at most, and can be difficult to control. It's a hassle when you're trying to paint an orange runway up to a blue bouncing patch that launches you through a portal cast on a white patch, only to have an errant blob of blue splash over everything. That's not to say that it's not great when your work of physics-defying impressionistic art comes together, of course.

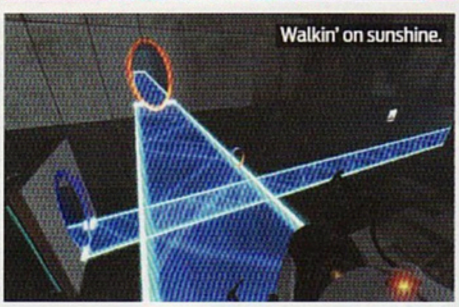
Behind the science

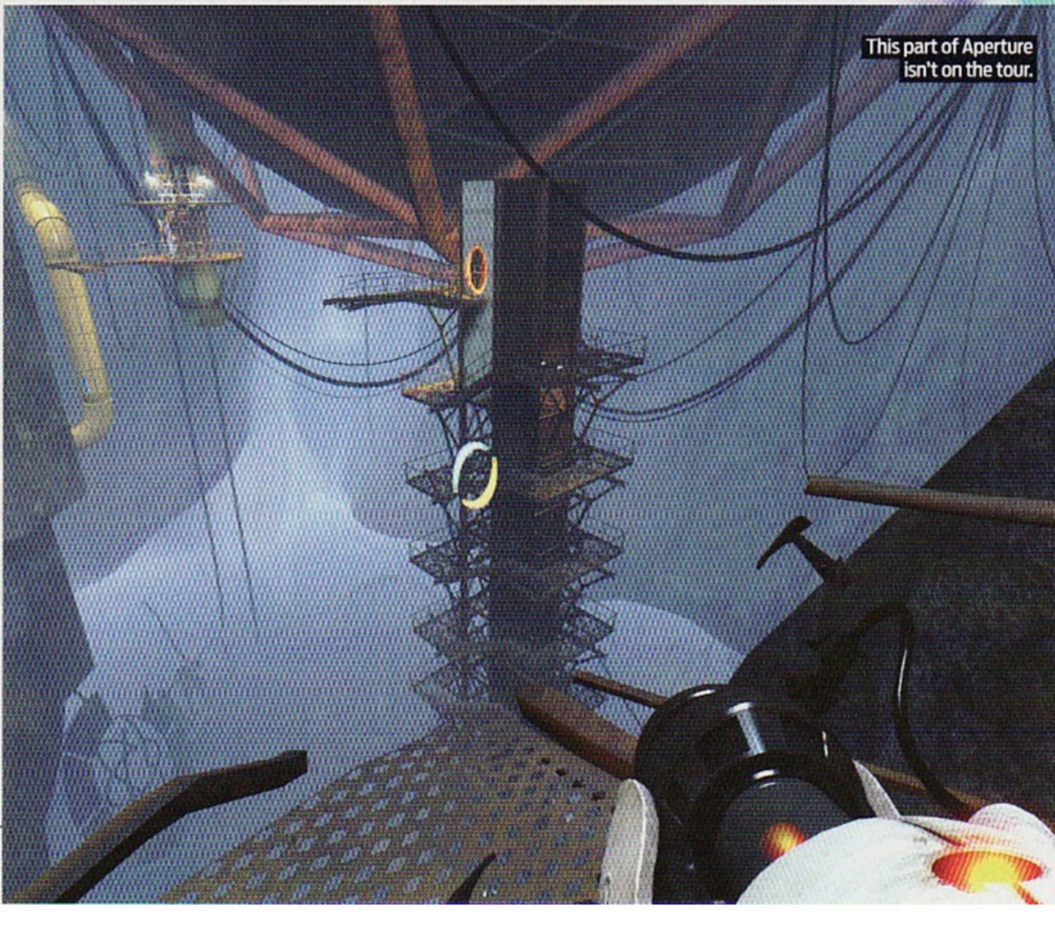
Locations are amazingly varied, as they must be to support this extended-length puzzle-athon without becoming monotonous. Aperture Science has fallen into disrepair in the indeterminate length of time between the greatly exaggerated "death" of its caretaker overlord and now, and many of its once-spotless test chambers are now rusted, grimy, and overgrown with vegetation. Maps shatter in front of our eyes as Aperture collapses on itself, while GLaDOS' hundreds of robot arms gradually repair and rearrange the chambers piece by piece. All of this scripted activity animates what would otherwise be still and samey-looking rooms due to *Portal*'s lack of foes other than stationary turrets.

The Aperture facility is far more vast than we could've imagined, and the quest to escape leads through its industrial bowels, a cavernous underground sewer-like area, and a long-forgotten retro 1960s version of Aperture, among others. Some areas are so dramatically different that even the basic button triggers and doors have unique looks to them, and everything is impressively modeled and textured, right down to the Easter-egg graffiti hidden throughout. Fine-brush touches extend to the sound, too, such as the wind wooshing in your ears during long drops, or tingly electric chimes that introduce themselves to the background music when you're speeding on Propulsion Gel. Between puzzles, *Portal 2*


Lasers always travel in a straight line. Unless there's a portal involved.


I ran for hours, but never caught up to her.


Walkin' on sunshine.


This part of Aperture isn't on the tour.

is full of thrilling showcase moments, such as a mad-dash escape from an angry intelligence that controls the very walls, followed by a surprising take on the boss battle that, without a shot fired, made me feel dangerously out-classed next to my adversary.

Size matters

Right around that time is when the test chambers become increasingly elaborate and intimidatingly huge—to a fault in some cases. These jumbo puzzles are so immense that, even using the handy camera zoom function, spotting the exit can take a few minutes of exploration. Setting out to solve a puzzle when you don't know what objective you're working toward is the wrong kind of challenge, and some will find it frustrating. Later levels have multiple contiguous puzzles that can seem like they might never end, and made me miss the pace of the early game where I'd get a refreshing break between challenges.

I always solved them, though. Even though a couple stumped me in a very serious way for up to a half hour, I couldn't give up until I made it to the other side. If you like a challenge, it's impossible to put this game aside until you've burned through all of it.

Portal 2's story doesn't end with the single-player campaign, however. Read on as my co-op buddy Evan takes you through the entirely separate and equally innovative and interesting multiplayer campaign.

These puzzles are doubly complex, but co-op wastes no time babying you with tutorials.

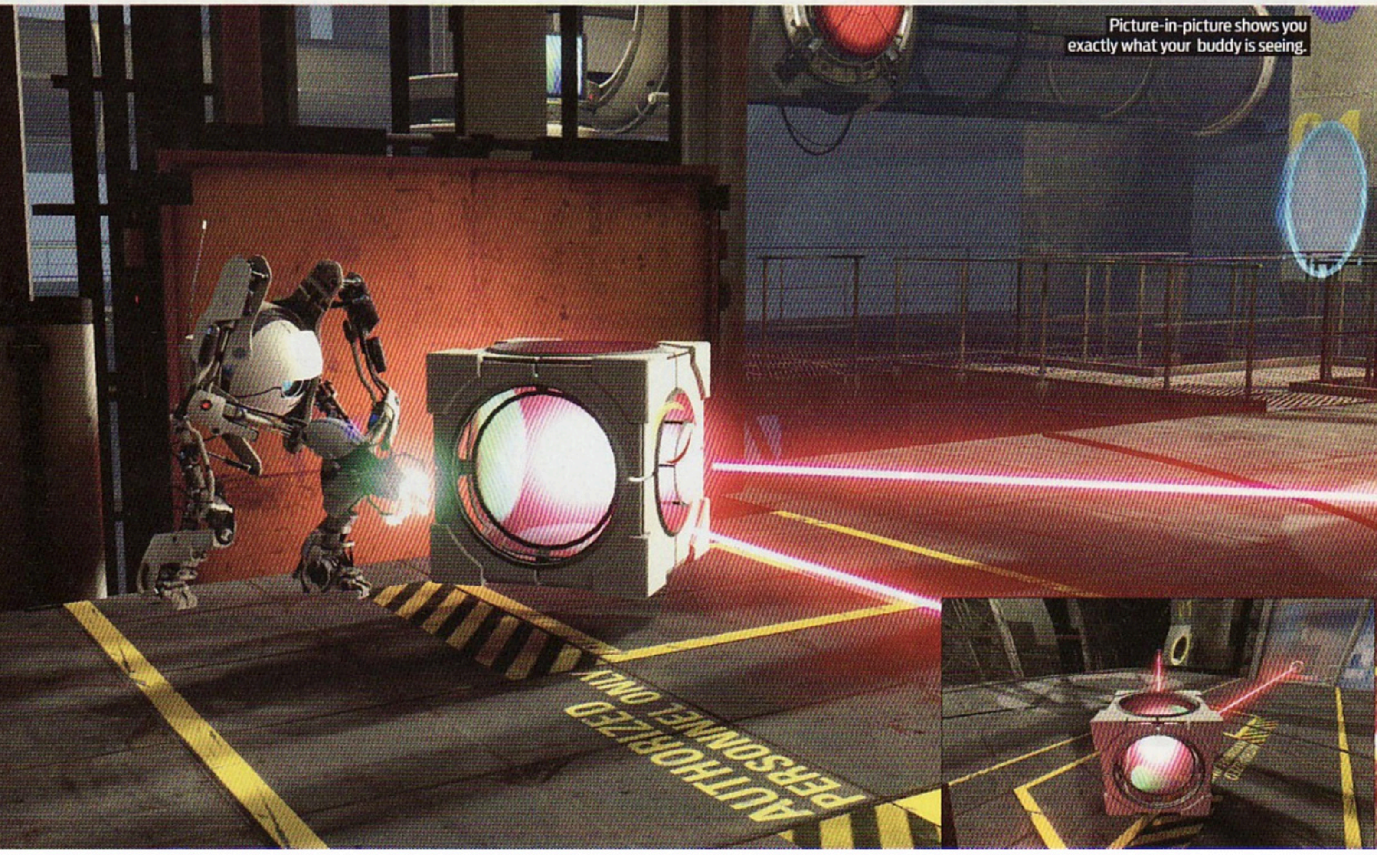
Two heads > one

I played the first *Portal* cooperatively. I always had a backseat driver—a roommate or a girlfriend—hovering over my chair, feeding what-ifs on where to sling my colored ovals. In *Portal 2*, Valve has officially supported that functionality, allowing you to share the burden of crunching your spatial options with another human brain. With the right sidekick, *Portal 2* co-op is some of the most social gaming you'll have. The occasional headaches that you'd get when you're stuck alone are alleviated by communication and dimensional horseplay.

You and your partner play as P-body and Atlas, a Pixar-esque Laurel and Hardy droid duo running the testing gauntlet at GLaDOS's whims in a separate, sillier story. They're not big talkers, only managing a few expressive squeaks and squeals of triumph and defeat, but their animations are lively and a joy to watch, and they've got some amusing celebratory co-op emotes.

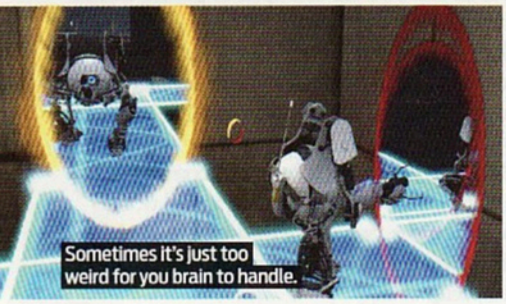
Five different testing zones are accessible through a massive hub room, for a total of more than 40 chambers (many of which are multi-part puzzles). Next to the single-player tests these puzzles are doubly complex, but co-op wastes no time babying you with tutorials—it ratchets up the difficulty immediately. Just the second one had us scratching our heads for several minutes trying to wrap our brains around the idea of linking our two sets of portals to achieve even-more-impossible feats that couldn't be navigated alone.

A handful of puzzles are wonderfully distinct from what you do in single-player: in one, I guided Dan through a contained rat maze of spiked walls that resembled GLaDOS' grisly version of a Pachinko



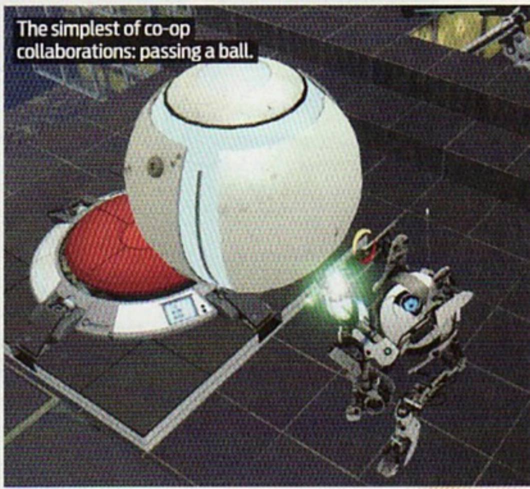
Picture-in-picture shows you exactly what your buddy is seeing.

Excursion Tunnels are the best method for controlled ascent.



Sometimes it's just too weird for you brain to handle.

Turrets hate being taunted.

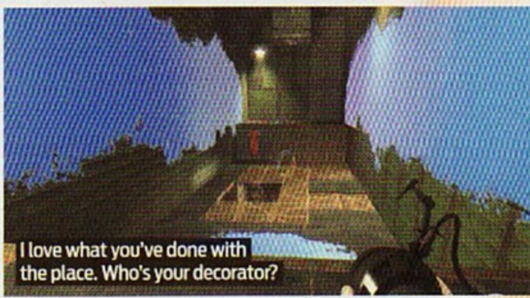


The simplest of co-op collaborations: passing a ball.

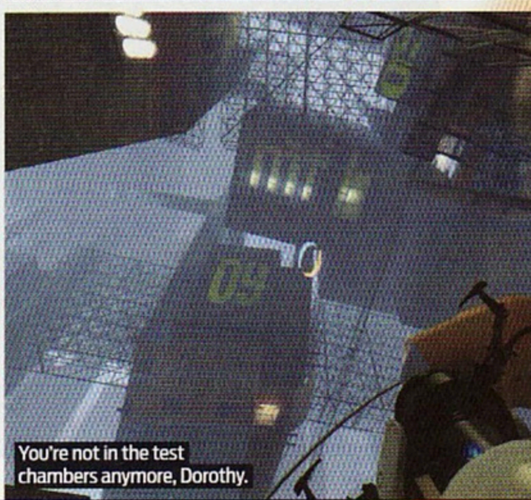
Aperture's Inventions

How do the latest toys rate?

	What it is	What it does	Used	Awesomeness
	Propulsion Gel	Makes you run faster	Often	●●○○○
	Moon Gel	Lets you put portals where you could not put portals before	Rarely	●●○○○
	Repulsion Gel	Bounces you off floors, walls and ceilings, increases jump height	Sometimes	●●●○○
	Excursion Funnel	Moves players and objects horizontally or vertically	Often	●●●●○
	Aerial Faith Plate	Mandatory destination jump-pad	Sometimes	●○○○○
	Lasers + Refraction Cubes	Death beam retargeter	Rarely	●●●●○
	Light Bridge	Walkways, anti-turret shields, flying-object stopper	Often	●●●●●



I love what you've done with the place. Who's your decorator?



You're not in the test chambers anymore, Dorothy.

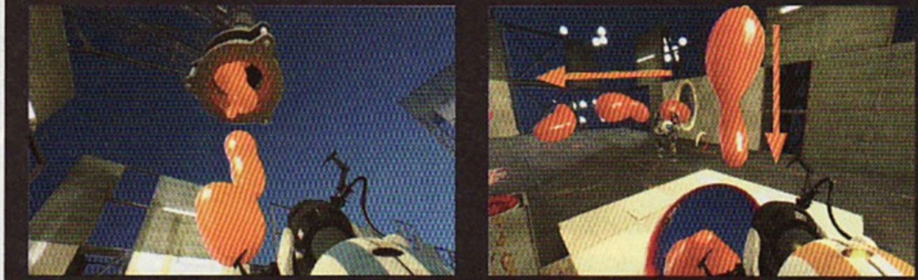
machine, carefully hopping on and off a pressure pad to reverse the direction of an Excursion Funnel to float him forward, juggling him back and forth to avoid death by giant stompy pile-driver while he cast new portals to change the path of the beam. Several times, Dan created a ceiling-and-floor loop that I'd fall through infinitely, until he re-cast one portal to launch me toward an objective at terminal velocity. Other rooms prompt careful timing: after many minutes pondering one, it finally dawned on Dan that we had to fling ourselves from opposite-facing portals and collide our bots in mid-air in order to safely land on a platform below. Gameplay-driven robot chest-bumps: *Portal 2* has them.

> *We had to fling ourselves from opposite-facing portals and collide our bots in mid-air.*

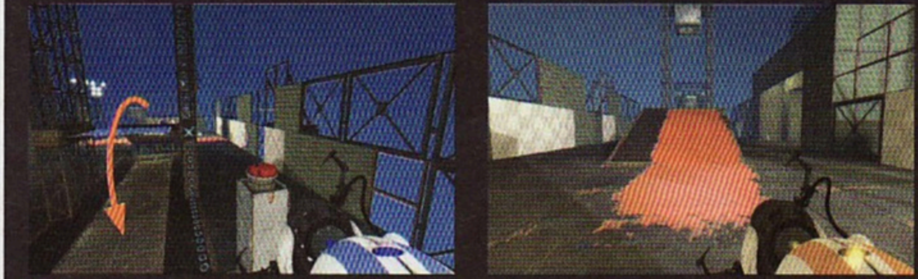
One puzzle, two perspectives

How to put a box on a button (Warning: minor puzzle spoiler!)

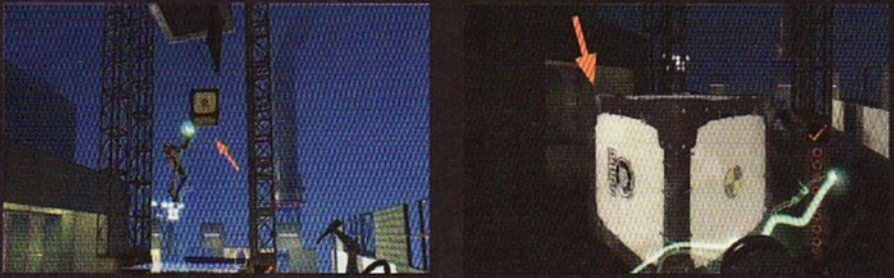
DAN'S VIEW **EVAN'S VIEW**



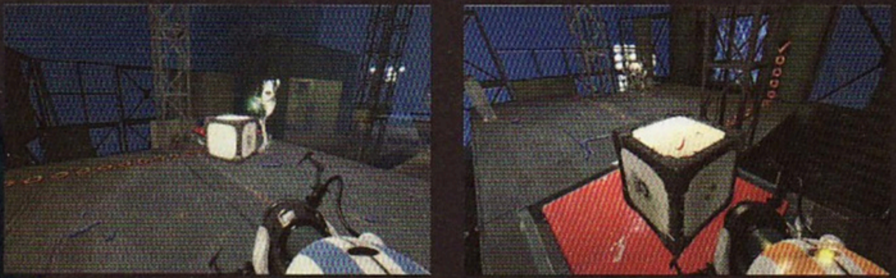
1 Evan casts one portal beneath a Propulsion Gel dispenser and another on a wall, then hits the dispenser button to squirt out some gel, which paints a nearby ramp orange. Presto: instant robot runway!



2 Dan launches off the ramp first (following the path of the arrow), landing on a platform near the locked exit. There's a pressure plate that unlocks the door, but it needs constant pressure to stay open. A button triggers a box dropped from the middle, but the boxes fall into a disintegration field. We need that box!



3 Timing it carefully, Dan hits the button at the same moment that Evan begins running toward the ramp. In mid-air, Evan snags the box and carries it with him safely to the other side.



4 With the box secured and both bots near the puzzle's exit, Evan drops it on the pressure plate to open the door and continue on to the next area. High-five emote time!

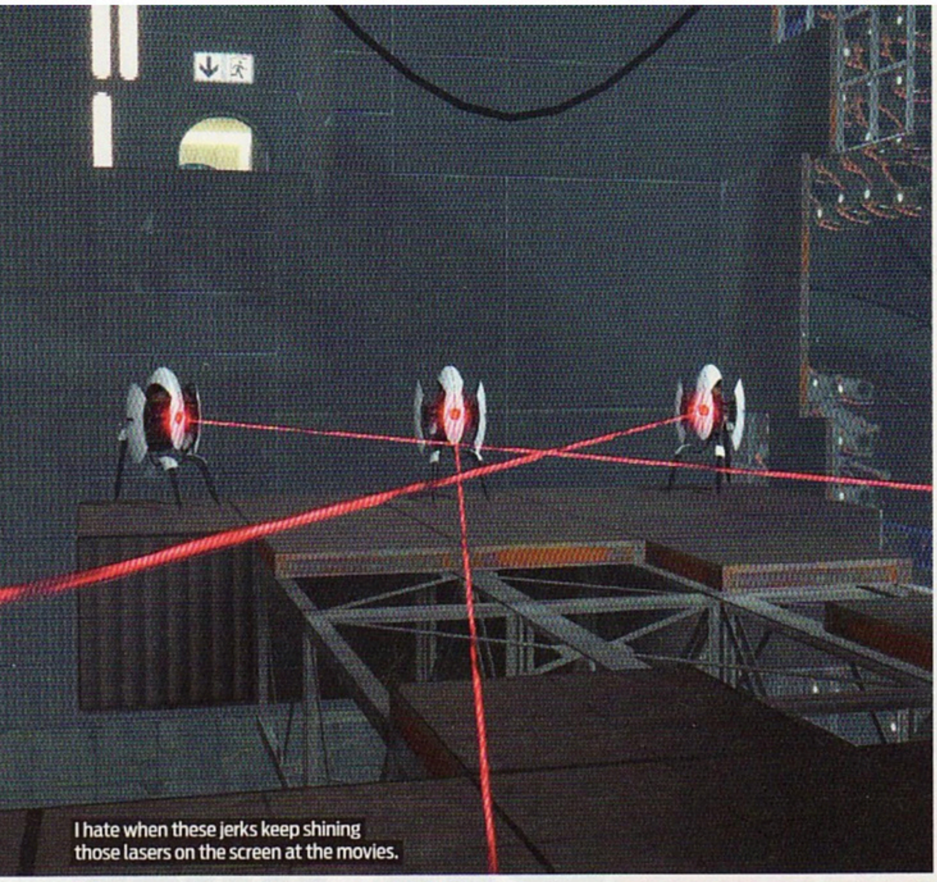
For the timing puzzles, there's an awesomely simple, non-verbal tool for syncing with your partner: holding the F key initiates a three-second countdown timer visible to both players. Two other tools tremendously supplement your (totally necessary) voice communication: marking, which lets you tag any spot or gizmo in the environment with a temporary pointer that's highlighted on your teammate's screen, and a seamless picture-in-picture toggle that shows you exactly what your buddy sees in the corner of your screen. Both are effortless to use and completely unimposing to the UI and gameplay, and between the two of them there's no confusion which acid pool he wants you to help him leap over.

I love the way that trust manifests as a gameplay mechanic, and the instant, painless respawning leaves room for antics: every few stages, I'd grief Dan a little bit by keeping him trapped in a levitation beam, moving a portal to remove the Light Bridge from under his feet, or overwriting his portal with mine at the last moment to steal a launch we'd set up.

These intangibles arise from the complex fun of moving and solving with another person, the most gratifying of which is having a gaming context where you can demonstrate your spark of awareness, creativity, or problem-solving knack. There's a wonderful reflex when this is about to happen—your eyes widen, a corner of your mouth rises. You're the only one in the class that knows the answer, and you are about to enlighten your teammate. It almost always starts with, "I have an idea."

Eureka!

There's also a fair amount of making fools of yourselves. In one of our prouder moments as a team, Dan and I spent 10 minutes trying to outsmart an Excursion Funnel/Faith Plate combo. We were so



I hate when these jerks keep shining those lasers on the screen at the movies.

APERTURE LABORATORIES

Stuck?

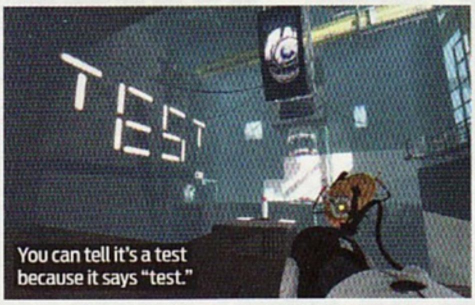
DO

- ✓ Look for a new perspective—try getting higher
- ✓ Is there goo? If so, cover every surface with it
- ✓ Sleep on a problem and come back with fresh eyes
- ✓ Try everything, even if you don't think it'll work

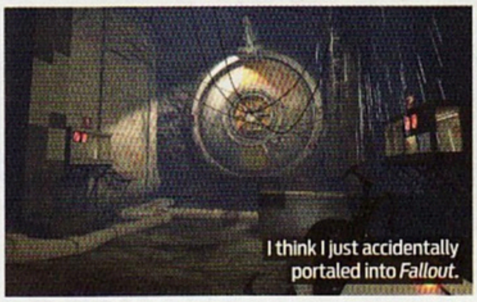
DON'T

- ✗ Spam your Portal Gun—that never works
- ✗ Get fixated on one approach—try accomplishing tasks in a different order
- ✗ Forget how to use your tools
- ✗ Ever give up

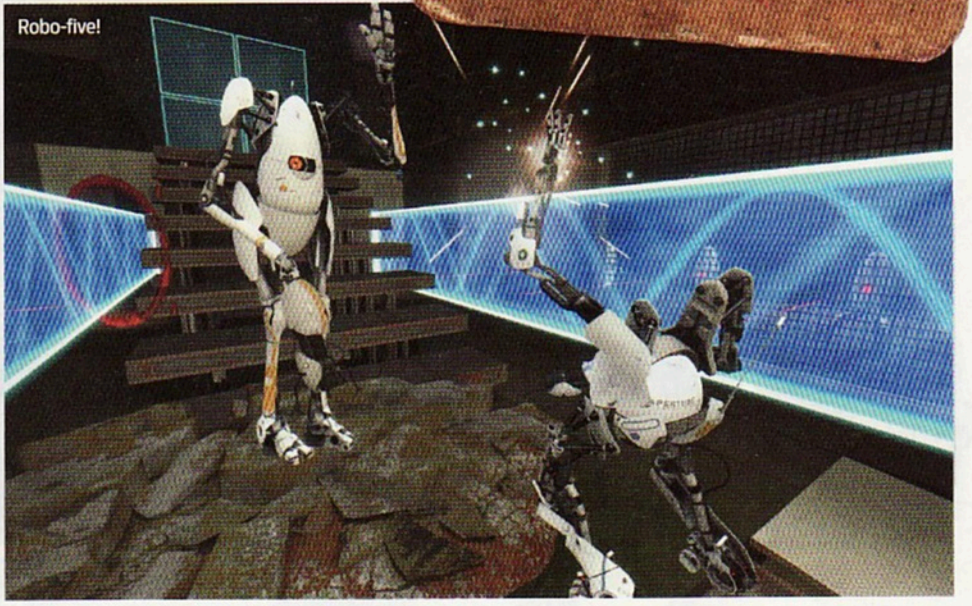
CLIPBOARD: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/NUSTOCK



You can tell it's a test because it says "test."



I think I just accidentally portaled into *Fallout*.



Robo-five!

busy activating switches and scouting the room for new options that it was some time before I realized that we'd forgotten the most basic part of *Portal* science: you can *walk through* the portals, not just send things through them.

From beginning to end, the co-op puzzles are excellent but brief. Dan and I zipped through all 40 in around four hours, which means you'll be able to finish both the single-player and co-op modes in a long weekend—partly because you won't want to stop playing. It's a minor shame that Valve didn't use co-op as an opportunity for a handful of optional, brutal obstacle courses like *Portal*'s challenge chambers—some of those take a weekend to work out.

Glad we came

It makes us both a little sad that, having played through once, we can never look at these puzzles—in either single-player or co-op—with those same bewildered eyes again (barring, as Aperture would call it, "a very minor case of serious brain damage"). The included developer commentary, and of course an encore performance from the cast, would be the only things that might make us start playing again after Jonathan Coulton's new song, "Glad You're Gone" (which is good, but "Still Alive" is a *really* tough act to follow) rolls with the credits.

For that reason, our strongest words of caution are to choose your co-op partner carefully. You only really get one shot at these puzzles—don't waste them with someone who's already been through, as that would spoil the many surprises and the victory of discovering them for yourself.

We'll definitely remember all of *Portal 2* fondly, though, and as one of the best-written and finely polished gaming experiences in recent memory. ■

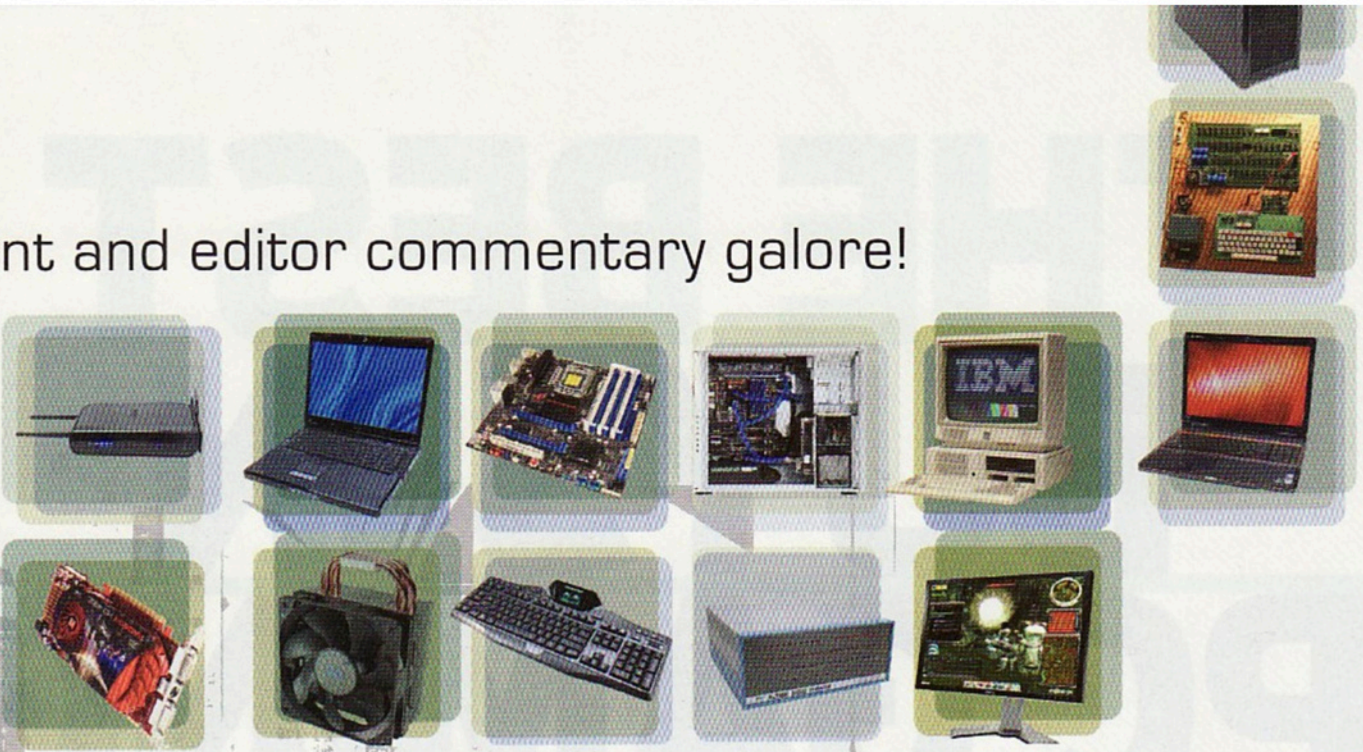
VERDICT

A challenging, hilarious, and mind-expanding puzzle experience for one or two—treasure your first time through.

PC GAMER 94

Visit MaximumPC.com for online-exclusive

VISIT MAXIMUMPC.COM



content and editor commentary galore!

- Up-to-the-minute news and analysis
- Late-breaking reviews
- Kick-ass product previews and how-tos
- PDF back issues—complete your collection!
- The ranterrific No BS Podcast

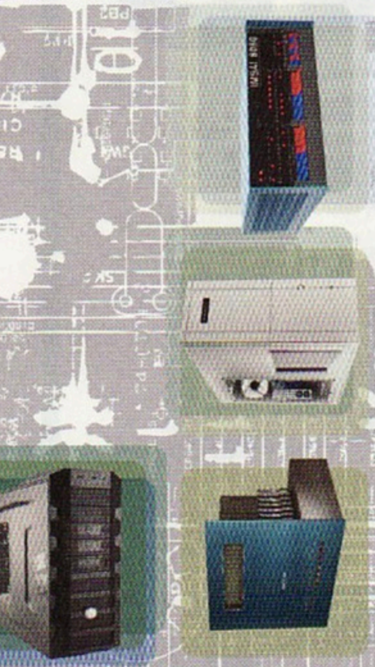
PLUS A LOT MORE!

Only at www.maximumpc.com

Follow us on Twitter at http://twitter.com/maximumpc twitter

Follow us on Facebook at http://facebook.com/maximumpc facebook

Digg our stories every time you see the Digg button! digg



THE BEST BUYS IN PC GAMING

Forget paying $60 for a new game—in the download age, you can buy a PC classic with the change under your couch cushions **by Richard Cobbett**

Not only have games never been cheaper, they've never gone down in price so fast. That hot new release may cost you between $50 and $60 on day one, but you can safely expect that to drop by 15, 25, or sometimes even 75 percent over the next few months in sale events on digital distribution services such as Steam and Good Old Games (www.gog.com). If you wait, you can usually get the best version of the game, and often all its DLC bundled in, for cheap.

So what should you do with the money you save? You buy more games! You take some risks! You try more genres! Maybe there was something that caught your eye back in the day, but you didn't have $50 to gamble on actually liking turn-based strategy games, or not being put off by some quibble that knocked its score down to around 70%. Maybe a classic like *Psychonauts* or *Sacrifice* simply slipped your attention at release, and you just never got around to catching up. Maybe you're attracted by a goofy title, or a cool screenshot, or a funny description. When the price tag says $5, it doesn't really matter whether a game is an unsung gem, or just something to pass the time on a dark, rainy evening.

Of course, we've set our sights a little higher, tracking down some of the best games that you can buy for under $20, $15 and $5, as well as a selection of former commercial games that have been officially re-released as freeware. We've avoided a few greats, like *Deus Ex*, in the name of giving some lesser-sung games a turn in the spotlight, and of course, there's always new sales popping up (in fact, there's probably already a few new ones since we wrote this). Remember: if the game on your mind isn't cheap enough yet, hold your fire—you'll rarely have to wait very long. ■

← TF2 →
← TORCHLIGHT →
← LAST EXPRESS →
← GEO. WARS →

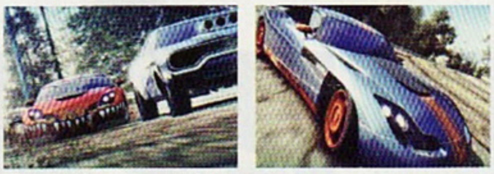
COIN JAR: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/JBRIZENDINE

$20 or less

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

$15 http://store.steampowered.com/app/20500/

Guerrilla is about smashing stuff. It pretends that it's about saving Mars from tyranny or some nonsense, but you can happily forget that right now. It's *really* about hammers and bombs and explosions and the satisfaction of seeing really big buildings come toppling down—a satisfying activity that persists right to the end of the game. Slip the difficulty down to keep a few of the annoyances with the AI and combat systems from getting in your way. So many games hand out powerful weapons—this is one of the rare few where they really do damage.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/24740/

It's one of the first open-world racing games, and still one of the most entertaining. It feels good, looks good, and you won't want for speed as you race around in search of races to win and stuff to smash into. There's even a dedicated Crash Mode to show off in, and drop-in online play that means you're never far from your next racing victory and/or defeat.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE: BLOODLINES

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/2600/

Only one game has earned the right to be seen as a potential successor to *Deus Ex*, and that's *Bloodlines*, Troika's dark, supernatural RPG/shooter hybrid. The shooting side is weak, but the RPG elements make up for it with a cast of amazing characters and genuinely unsettling opportunities for evil. Make sure you install the fan patches though—it's a fixer-upper.

FAR CRY 2

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/19900/

Far Cry 2 is still one of the more successful open-world shooters out there, not just for its hardcore approach to combat, but for the moral questions and unusual themes it plays with. You're the worst mercenary ever, heading into Africa without preparing for malaria. Then you get stuck in a situation where all you can really hope to do is make the situation slightly less-worse for all concerned without getting killed. This version comes with the *Fortunes* DLC pack, which added a few new weapons and multiplayer maps.

When traveling to Africa, pack medicine and giant guns.

BIOSHOCK 2

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/8850/

Pity poor *BioShock 2*, it was cursed with having to continue a game that most people agreed was already finished off quite nicely, thank you. It's no wonder it sank like its underwater city setting. Here's the thing, though: it's an excellent sequel, with some terrific storytelling and improved level design. And while it may look like the first game, in practice, it's a complete thematic inversion with some achingly wonderful emotional scenes.

TEAM FORTRESS 2

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/440/

Since it came out four years ago, Valve's team-based multiplayer shooter has become one of the PC's best-supported games. Its nine player classes—including favorites like the Spy, Heavy and Engineer—are locked in eternal battle with an ever-expanding array of weaponry. Grab it and join our server at IP address 66.151.138.34:27015.

CIVILIZATION IV

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/3900/

This turn-based-strategy world simulator series has a far-reaching reputation of being one of PC gaming's most addictive morsels, and most die-hards will tell you that number four is the best of the bunch. At $20, you could easily play *Civilization IV* until your cost-per-hour for completely engrossed entertainment drops to pennies.

OBLIVION: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/22330/

Not only one of the best RPGs in recent years, but also the perfect way to prep for its 2011 sequel, *Skyrim*. This GOTY edition includes the standard game, plus both expansions: the frankly dull *Knights of the Nine* and the much more interesting *Shivering Isles*, in which you run errands for the God of Madness.

AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT

$20 http://store.steampowered.com/app/57300/

Amnesia is a masterpiece of adventure horror, turning one of the most generic premises in gaming into one of the most unforgettably scary experiences around. At this price, we'll simply say that it's worth turning the lights off and your speakers up, and hope that you'll still be able to play after a few levels.

FALLOUT COLLECTION

$20 www.impulsedriven.com/products/ESD-IMP-W2067

Fallout remains a fan favorite, with its dark humor and serious setting. *Fallout 2* lightened up a little, with much more overt parodies littering the world (like *Monty Python*'s Bridge of Death) and New Reno, where you can take out the trash or become a porn star. The third game, *Tactics*, is a combat-focused spin-off that can safely be ignored.

$15 or less

TORCHLIGHT

$15 store.steampowered.com/app/41500/

While it may only be a snack compared to the five-course banquet promised by *Diablo III*, we all enjoy a good Mars bar now and again. *Torchlight* understands what makes the genre fun like few others, with its hefty, satisfying combat, endless loot and simple-but-effective tweaks to the format, such as being able to send your character's pet back to town to sell unwanted loot instead of having to waste time walking back and forth. The sequel is coming later this year, but the first game is still perfectly good popcorn entertainment.

SAINTS ROW 2

$15 www.gamersgate.com/DD-SAINTS2/saints-row-2

Saints Row 2 is *Grand Theft Auto* before it became boring. In *SR2*, you can strip naked and run around with a rocket launcher, or drive a septic truck on a mission to spray hookers and johns with a firehose of splattering effluent. *SR2* is the most fun you can have without actually losing your soul.

ANOTHER WORLD

$10 www.gamersgate.com/DD-OOTW/another-world-15th-anniversary-edition

You probably know this artsy classic by it's American name, *Out of This World*. It's tougher than you probably remember, but few other games have ever created a world that felt so alien, so hostile, with so little.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: DIAMOND EDITION

$10 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/neverwinter_nights_diamond_edition

Name the biggest RPG ever. *Baldur's Gate*? No. *Daggerfall*? You smartass, yes, it probably is. In second place, however, there's *Neverwinter Nights*. The campaign is pure crap, but what you're really buying is access to all the great fan-made content out there. There are some genuinely brilliant creations available—even above and beyond what was made with its more advanced sequel.

PSYCHONAUTS

$10 http://store.steampowered.com/app/3830/

Do you like fun? If you answered yes, but didn't play *Psychonauts*, you're officially a hypocrite. Don't worry, though: you can atone now. *Psychonauts* isn't the greatest platformer, but you won't find many games as full of incredible moments and leaps of sheer "How the hell did they come up with this stuff?" logic. Every level is both a stunning bit of originality, and an often surprisingly touching character study.

BROKEN SWORD TRILOGY

$10 www.dotemu.com/en/download-game/555/broken-sword-trilogy

These are beautiful adventure game masterpieces. The first revolves around the Knights Templar (long before every other historical-fiction mystery did). Number two switched to Mayan mythology, and the third takes on the mysterious Voynich Manuscript, along with new-age nonsense about dragon energies. All three are excellent, well written and largely unblemished by age.

THE VOID

$10 http://store.steampowered.com/app/37000/

You're trapped between states, harvesting color to survive and feed the usually stark-naked denizens trapped with you. Got that? You don't know the half of it. If you ever feel like games are getting a bit samey, this is the game for you. You may love it. You may hate it. Either way, you'll definitely find it an original, unforgettable experience.

BALDUR'S GATE 2

$10 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/baldurs_gate_2_complete

Baldur's Gate 2 serves up traditional RPG action, far more epic than most. The sweeping story stumbles a bit at first, but picks up with a vengeance in the included expansion, *Throne of Bhaal*, which levels your main character up to god-like power.

PLANESCAPE TORMENT

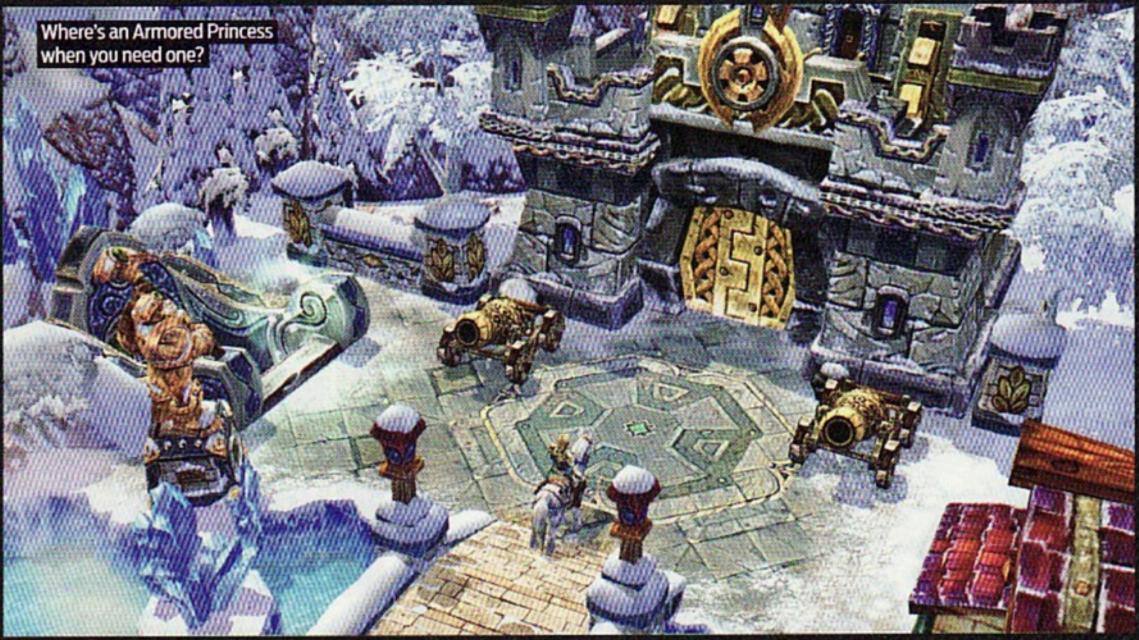
$10 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/planescape_torment

Arguably the most intelligent roleplaying game ever written, *Torment* treats philosophy and standard RPG tropes as its playthings. From the fact that the hero can't die to the web of miseries that bind his companions to him, it's an unforgettable story.

AGE OF WONDERS: SHADOW MAGIC

$10 www.gamersgate.com/DD-AOWSM/age-of-wonders-shadow-magic

It's grand turn-based strategy in the fine tradition of *Heroes of Might and Magic*. This is a good introduction to the style, and an excellent reminder if you've simply lost contact with the genre over the last few years.


Where's an Armored Princess when you need one?

KING'S BOUNTY: THE LEGEND

$15 http://store.steampowered.com/app/25900

King's Bounty is a stack-based, turn-by-turn strategy game, with one very important twist: it's insane. The follow-ups to 2009's *Legend* improved the core action, but at the expense of some of the original's individualism—such as the ability to shrink down and have fights inside of your own items to improve them. It's far from a welcoming game, though, and will happily beat you down with your own incompetence the first few times you play. But it's worth it. Set aside the time for it if you've never played a game like this before.

SPACE RANGERS 2

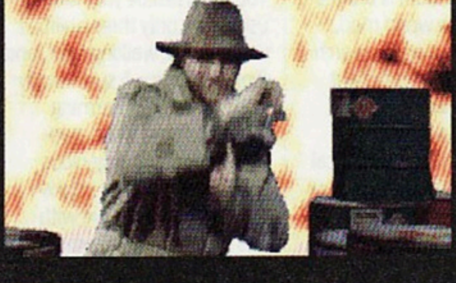
$15 www.impulsedriven.com/sr2x

Space, as a wise man once said, is big. In *Space Rangers 2*, it's also ridiculously free-form, starting you out with a small ship and some vague murmurs about defeating rampaging robots, then cutting you loose to do whatever you feel like in a universe that happily hums along in the background, whatever you choose. Adventure style dialog. RPG development. A little light conquest as time permits. It's your ship. It's your life. It's your choice.

TEX MURPHY: THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE

$10 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/tex_murphy_the_pandora_directive

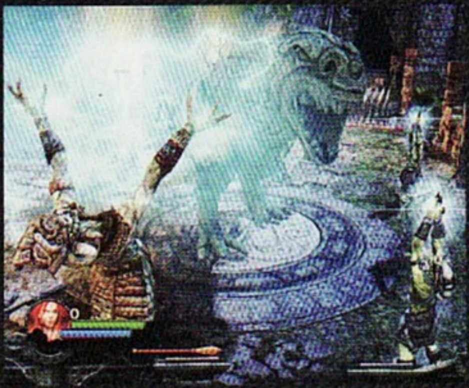
The days when full-motion video ruled the world were dark times. Even in darkness though, you occasionally see a spark of light—and few have shone brighter than *Tex Murphy*. This was by far his best, mixing a 3D world with surprisingly good video sequences to tell a captivating story of an old-school PI in the future, up to his neck in a conspiracy stretching back to the Roswell incident.



LARA CROFT AND THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT

$15 store.steampowered.com/app/35130/

The best *Tomb Raider* of recent years isn't really a *Tomb Raider* game at all. *Guardian of Light* pulls the camera back and replaces the usual 3D platforming with a simpler version geared purely around fun. The story is bilge, but the puzzles are fantastic, whether you're playing through on your own (as Lara) or teaming up with a friend (as a boring warrior called Totec). You can blitz through the story in no time flat, but working your way through the optional challenges will take a good while.



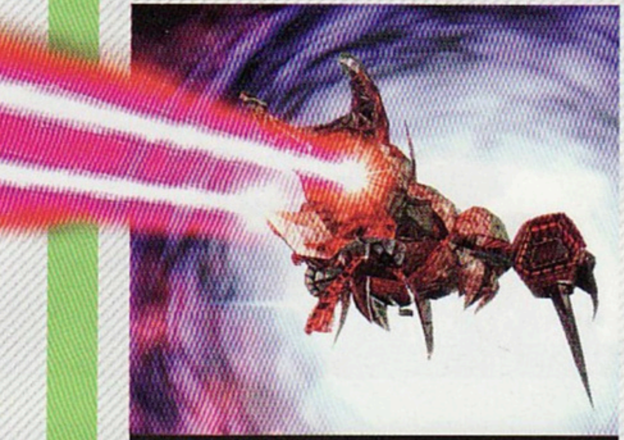
Robbing wannabe pirates is a good way to scrape up $15.

MONKEY ISLAND BUNDLE

$15 http://store.steampowered.com/sub/6183/

Two of the most beloved adventure games ever, updated and in the same pack. The *Special Edition* remake of *Secret of Monkey Island* was slightly underwhelming, but remains worth playing for the series' place in history. *Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge*, on the other hand, is a phenomenal upgrade to a far better game, with excellent voices, great repainted artwork and a (sadly short) in-game commentary from its original creators. Whether you played them back in the heyday of LucasArts adventure games or missed out, they're wonderfully written games. Both are available individually for $10 a piece if you only need one.

$6 or less



FREESPACE 2

$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/freespace_2

The tragedy of *Freespace 2* is that over a decade later, it's still the best space shooter ever made. It's the most epic, with its gigantic capital ships and huge laser beams. It's the most satisfying, as you fight an alien menace that actually feels like it's just toying with you. Add in a few fan-made patches, and it still looks glorious. Finishing it is just the excuse you need to play the fan-made campaigns built specifically to fill the void left by the lack of a *Freespace 3*.

THE LAST EXPRESS

$6 www.dotemu.com/en/download-game/608/the-last-express-collectors-edition

It's the eve of WW1, and the *Orient Express* is unknowingly making its final journey across Europe before hostilities break out. This real-time adventure is a true classic, turning walking up and down a train for several hours into a captivating experience. No expense was spared on atmosphere, from native speakers voicing characters from across Europe, to meticulously recreating the cars on board the train itself. It's a magical, if occasionally slow, journey, and one guaranteed to stick with you.

MASTER OF ORION + MASTER OF ORION 2

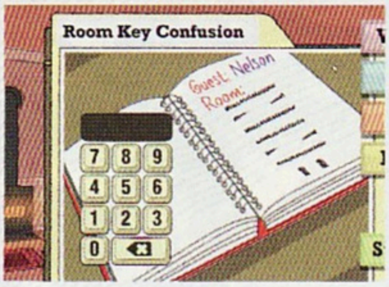
$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/master_of_orion_1_2

Ask 100 4X strategy fans to name their favorite game, and *Master of Orion 2* will almost certainly win. It's an epic struggle of strategy, diplomacy and discovery, and one whose age has done little (if anything) to diminish its charms. Very few games in the genre have even come close to replicating its success, with the possible exception of *Galactic Civilizations II*. But that costs more than six bucks.

NELSON TETHERS: PUZZLE AGENT

$5 http://store.steampowered.com/app/31270/

It's the adventure you can solve without ruining your appetite for brain-twisters. *Puzzle Agent*'s quirky puzzles are tied together with a simple, surreal story about an eraser factory in a small midwestern town. And while they're not always inspired, they hit a good balance that's complex enough to feel satisfying while avoiding frustration.



GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS

$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/gabriel_knight_sins_of_the_fathers

In Gabriel Knight—a failed horror author who suddenly finds himself the heir to a monster-hunting legacy—Jane Jensen created one of the best adventure game heroes ever. It's not the usual kind of horror though, taking a more adult, often even romantic angle on things, and leaving the expected splatterfests to lesser series like *Phantasmagoria* and *Elvira*. This first game sets the tone for the even-better second.

OUTCAST

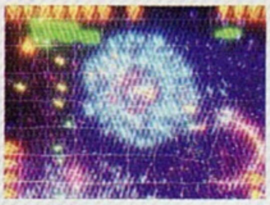
$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/outcast

In another universe, *Outcast* was a platform-defining RPG-shooter hybrid—the PC's own *Legend of Zelda*, widely acclaimed for its scale, ambition, sense of humor and beautiful, world-changing voxel graphics. In ours, it's a cult classic. Give *Outcast* enough time to hook you in.

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH

$5 http://store.steampowered.com/app/8890/

Freedom Force is about love. Not in the sense that its hero characters defeat Hitler with kissing, but in its devotion to the energy and excesses of Silver Age comics. This sequel offered better missions and difficulty than the first game, but both are great.



GEOMETRY WARS

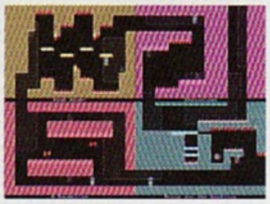
$4 http://store.steampowered.com/app/8400/

You'll learn to fear simple squares, circles and diamonds as you master the arts of blowing them away on the constantly fluctuating board of shimmering plasma. Your only goal is to survive long enough to set a high score, and your ultimate defeat is guaranteed.

X-COM: UFO DEFENSE

$5 http://store.steampowered.com/app/7760/

The original *X-COM* is still the best. From the world map, you build bases and research captured alien tech to fight back against an endless stream of invaders. On the ground, a turn-based tactical combat system will have you biting your fingernails every time you step into battle.



VVVVVV

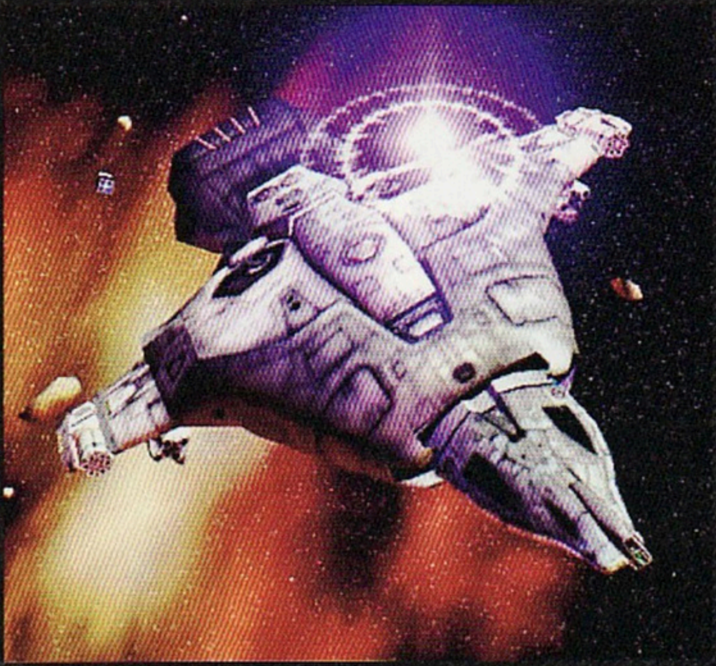
$5 http://store.steampowered.com/app/70300/

You must rescue your friends using your only three abilities: walking left, walking right, and flipping gravity. A surprisingly engaging story, charming super-retro graphics, awesome music and ingenious level design make it impossible not to fall in love with this arcade-puzzle gem.

THE MISADVENTURES OF P.B. WINTERBOTTOM

$5 http://store.steampowered.com/app/40930/

He's an evil, pie-stealing, self-cloning machine—and he's hungry. *P.B. Winterbottom* is a clever-gimmick platformer along the lines of *Braid*, but with far less pretension. The specific gimmick is the ability to record actions, then keep playing the level while your previous incarnations continue to carry them out—pressing buttons, flipping see-saws, and carefully timing dashes to retrieve delicious pie from the most inconvenient places. The monochrome retro-look adds to the charm, and the puzzling itself is satisfying without getting too hard.



INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: EDGE OF CHAOS

$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/independence_war_2

If you find regular space-shooters a little too primitive, you just might like the *Independence War* series, which boasts real physics. The first is the most hardcore, but the second tones the difficulty down a lot and adds some *Elite*-style trading and *Privateer*-esque plot advancement. If you only pick one, go with the latter, but prepare to give it quite a bit of time before you feel entirely comfortable getting into dogfights and pulling off stunts in zero-gravity.

DUKE NUKEM 3D: ATOMIC EDITION

$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/duke_nukem_3d_atomic_edition

Hail to the king, baby! For less than the price of a Big Mac combo, you really can't go wrong with *Duke*. If you played it back in the day, you'll have a blast gunning down Pig Cops all over again. If you somehow missed it the first time around, or you're an (M-rating approved) youngster looking to learn what "first-person shooter" *used* to mean, here's a discount ticket to the front row as Duke zaps aliens with shrink rays and tells pixelated strippers to "Shake it, baby." With *Duke Nukem Forever* nearly here, now's a good time to catch up.

SACRIFICE

$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/sacrifice

This cult-strategy classic never got the attention it was due, but even today, it's worth playing. Its up-close-and-personal strategy keeps things fast and furious, giving you access to game-changing powers in the middle of combat, as well as an army of loyal minions to do your bidding. It was a funny game too, full of bickering gods and great one-liners. Unlike many strategy games of its time, the tech and AI remain good enough for it to still be playable, and there still aren't any modern successors to make it feel as old as it otherwise might.

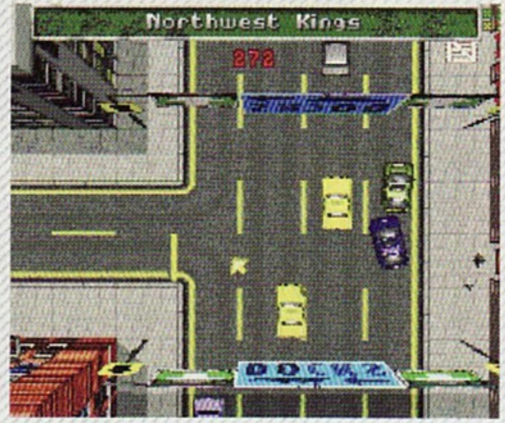
STEEL ARCHER
LEVEL 23
ATTACK 41 · DEFENSE 39
DAMAGE 3-11
ARMOR 143
CHANCE TO HIT 95
HITPOINTS 128

DIVINE DIVINITY

$6 www.gog.com/en/gamecard/divine_divinity

Divine Divinity is one of very few modern RPGs worth mentioning in the same breath as games like *Ultima VII*, and is easily big and complex enough to fight in the same arena. If anything, it's slightly too big, but that's absolutely fine if you want a quest that you can settle into and play for the long haul. Skip the sequel, *Beyond Divinity*, though. Even fans of the series will usually agree that it wasn't very good, and that you'd be better off rejoining the action in *Divinity 2*—but that one hasn't had its big price cut yet.

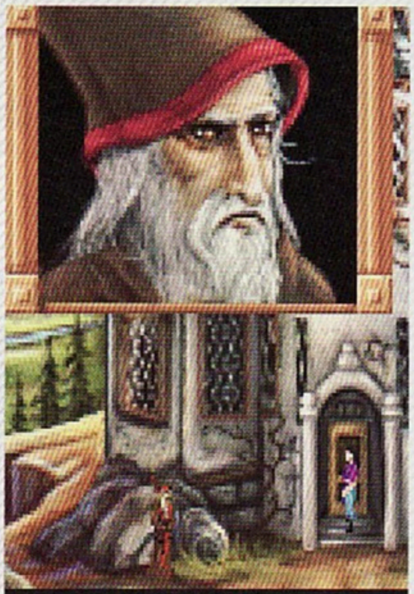
FREE FOR ALL



GRAND THEFT AUTO & GTA 2

www.rockstargames.com/classics/

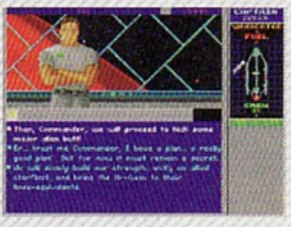
Nobody could have predicted that this simple top-down driving shooter—fun though it was—would one day be a billion-dollar franchise. It's a pure arcade game, right down to the fact that missions are simply a way of earning the points that you need to unlock other cities. The sequel moves the action into the future and adds a faction system, but for our money, the first is the better of the two games. You can download both of them for free and find out for yourself—but be warned, they're rat-bastard hard.



KING'S QUEST III REDUX

www.agdinteractive.com/games/kq3

King's Quest III is one of the oldest adventures, and now also the newest. This remake, which came out earlier this year, leaves most of the gameplay untouched, but boosts the graphics to snazzy 256-color VGA, tweaks some of the puzzles (the original, for instance, featured a couple of very long sections where nothing much happened) and performs other important enhancements. You don't need to know the first two *KQ* games to follow it, but they've also been remade.



STAR CONTROL II

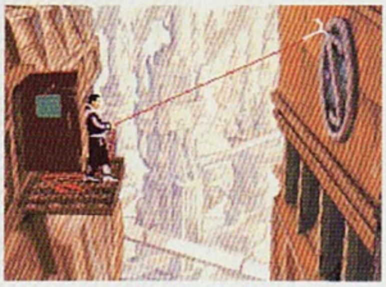
http://sc2.sourceforge.net

Many 4X games can be a little—how to put this tactfully—dull. *Star Control II* is anything but dull. It's funnier than many comedies, more adventurous than many adventures. The combat is simple, but every ship you field feels completely alien, making building up the perfect fleet a real joy. Keep a walkthrough close at hand—*Star Control II* is from an era where allowing unwinnable situations was acceptable design.

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

www.scummvm.org/downloads/#extras

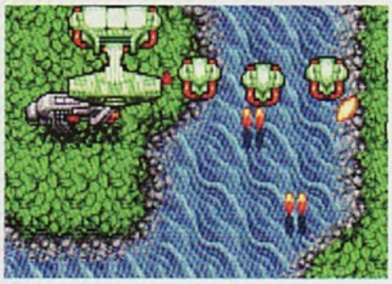
BASS has become the adventure equivalent of an old *Star Trek* episode—a comfortable, nostalgic bit of sci-fi you can slip into and enjoy, thanks to its dry sense of wit, backed by some fantastic world-building and art by *Watchmen* co-creator Dave Gibbons. It's not a long game, nor particularly tricky, but it's a very entertaining one to explore your way through.

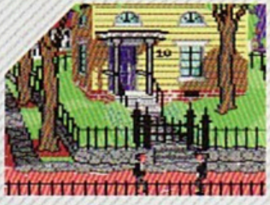


TYRIAN 2000

www.gog.com/en/gamecard/tyrian_2000

Top-down shooters have never really been a PC thing, but this one gives it a good go. It's much as you'd expect: you're sent against wave after wave of enemies, but the extras are impressive. It's a good laugh, from the story told in emails between missions to the number of ships you can upgrade to, and the load of Easter Eggs and hidden goodies that give you the chance to save the world in a flying carrot.

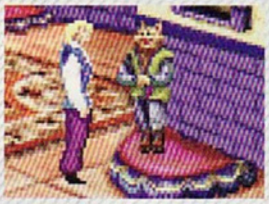




SARIEN.NET

www.sarien.net

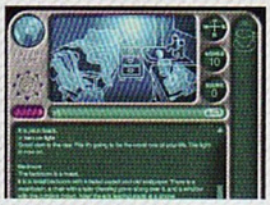
If you'd rather play free Sierra games in their original incarnation, try out Sarien.net. The only addition is "multiplayer" support—not for solving puzzles, but for chatting with other people during their single-player adventures. It tends to be a low-traffic site though, so you're mostly still going to be on your own.



QUEST FOR GLORY II

www.agdinteractive.com/games/qfg2/

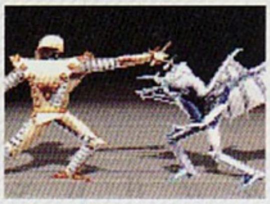
Quest for Glory 2 is an adventure/RPG hybrid, often held up as the best of a very popular series. Set in the desert land of Shapeir, you can be a Fighter, Magic User or Thief, each with a customized main quest and lots of bonus opportunities to explore.



THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hitchhikers/game_nolan.shtml

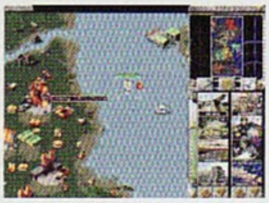
Douglas Adams wrote a radio series that became a book that became a game. This is that game. Puzzles make little sense, unwinnable situations are cruel—if it didn't have the license attached, it would likely be referred to as crap. But it *does* have the license.



ONE MUST FALL 2097

www.reloaded.org/download/One-Must-Fall-2097/136/

This is the closest the PC has ever had to a *Street Fighter*-style game it could be proud of. It's extremely entertaining, with an excellent campaign and lots of different robots to own and upgrade. It lives on as a slice of '90s nostalgia that's still worth playing today.



COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

http://bit.ly/CCRADownload

You can substitute the original *C&C* or *C&C2: Tiberian Sun*, as they're also available for free, but you'll get more out of the first clash between Soviets and Allies in their world of mad-science and Tesla coils, created when Einstein had the brilliant idea of going back in time to assassinate Hitler.

THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL

http://uesp.net/wiki/Daggerfall:Files

How big do you want your games? A couple of towns? An overworld map pretending to be a continent still not enough? Try *Daggerfall*: it's 487,000 square kilometers with 15,000 towns, and you can walk every last inch of it, if you're crazy enough to want to. Most of it is, unsurprisingly, quite empty, but there's a seriously impressive collection of guilds, factions, quests and more to get involved with beyond the main quest line. It's an odd game, but an immersive one—and one you won't be done with any time soon if it gets its hooks in you.

GROUND CONTROL

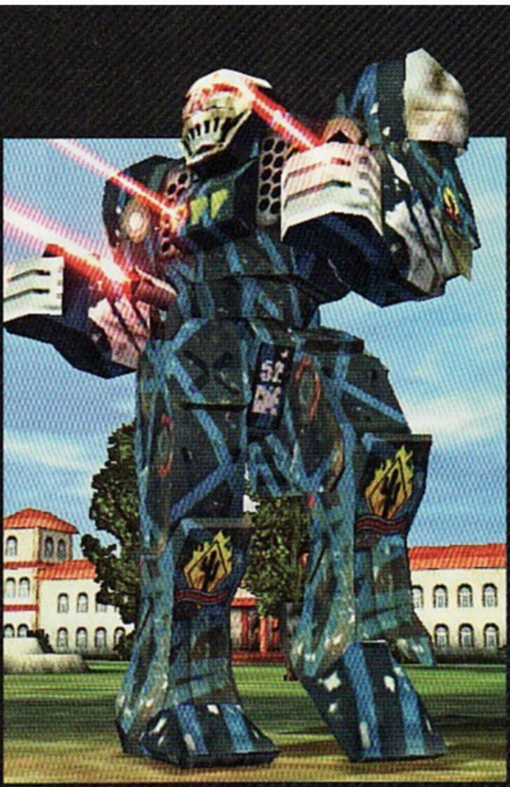
www.fileplanet.com/217370/210000/fileinfo/Ground-Control-(Free-Game)

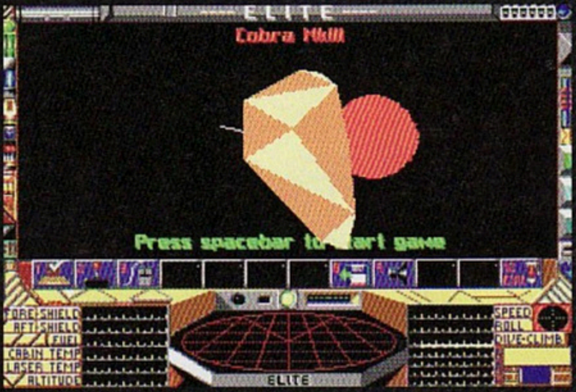
Ground Control put the tactics back into real time strategy, boldly throwing out bases and resources before it was cool, and focusing entirely on managing a finite supply of units. Don't expect to find many players to go up against anymore, but there's still a small active community if you poke around. (Note: you'll need to sign up for a free FilePlanet account to get a key.)

MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES

www.mektek.net/projects/mw4/

What happened to the stompy-mech genre? We miss the scale, the heavy ordnance, the squish of passers-by under our giant metal legs. *MechWarrior 4* was one of the last games to offer this kind of action, but there's some consolation: it's free, and it's had several expansions since becoming so. Download it and the extra MekPaks, and relive the experience of towering over the battlefield. And, quite likely, the bonus experience of tumbling down towards the battlefield, walking tanks being very silly Indeed.





ELITE

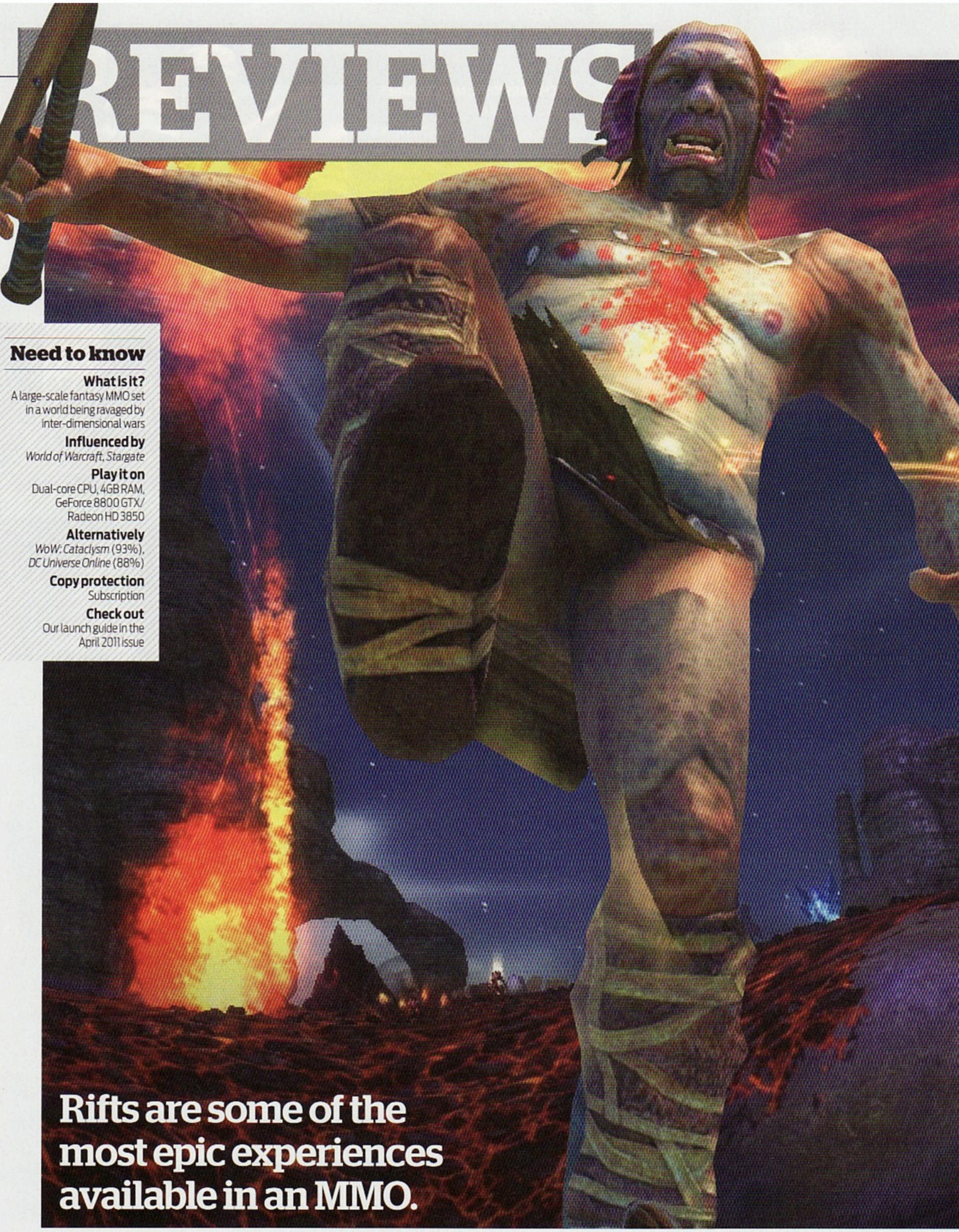
www.iancgbell.clara.net/elite/pc/index.htm

Some games need no introduction. *Elite*, and its VGA follow-up, *Elite Plus*, are on that list. The original space-trading simulator may not be a technical showpiece anymore, but it's where the whole genre started. Jump back into your Cobra Mark III for a nostalgic trip through the space-lanes. Of course, the real reason to visit the site is *Elite: The Musical* (really).

MARATHON TRILOGY

http://trilogyrelease.bungie.org

To PC gamers, these are virtually unknown. To Mac gamers, they're "those amazing Mac games Bungie did before selling out with *Halo*." But they're an interesting slice of history—a series of very story-driven *Doom*-style shooters with sprite-based characters running around on a 3D map. All three are fully playable on PC, thanks to an open-source version of the engine. Download the player, AlephOne, and drop it into a directory of data files to play the games.



Need to know

What is it?
A large-scale fantasy MMO set in a world being ravaged by inter-dimensional wars

Influenced by
World of Warcraft, *Stargate*

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GTX/ Radeon HD 3850

Alternatively
WoW: Cataclysm (93%), *DC Universe Online* (88%)

Copy protection
Subscription

Check out
Our launch guide in the April 2011 issue

Rifts are some of the most epic experiences available in an MMO.

TERRIFTIC

RIFT's rifts are the star of this massive MMO *by Jonathan Cooper*

"Defend the Wardstone!" the warrior beside me bellowed, seconds before being overrun by Breathless Banshees. Undead hordes were invading Telara, spewing out of swirling, interdimensional rifts. The army of the Plane of Death—banshees, ghosts, ghouls, and drake—marched forth, cutting down any players and NPCs in its path. We, the ragtag group of players who happened to be there when the assault began, were all that stood in the way. From a tower in the last city standing in Scarlet Gorge I frantically fired off healing spells, but things weren't looking good. If the Wardstone fell, all would be lost. The undead would occupy the land.

Just in time, an uneasy alliance of players from both the Defiants and the Guardians (*Rift*'s rival factions) finished sealing the last of the Death rifts. While they'd normally have slain each other on sight, they stood together against the common threat and managed to turn the tide. This truce was short-lived, however. Closing the final rift triggered a climactic stage: a huge wave of zombies. Once the horde showed their decaying faces the factions once again crossed blades, each hoping to claim the best quest rewards for themselves. My faction, the Defiants, emerged victorious, and all who contributed were fabulously rewarded.

These frequent, zone-wide events aren't a distraction from *Rift*—they *are Rift*, and they're some of the most epic, fantastic experiences available in MMOs today.

Without these rifts, Telara would be nearly indistinguishable from any other generic fantasy world. At one point in its lore, it *was* a typical fantasy realm, filled with elves, dwarves and orcs galore. These days, the veil between planar dimensions is as weak as a damp Kleenex, allowing invaders from the planes of Air, Death, Earth, Fire, Life, and Water to open rifts and appear anywhere. The world is constantly under attack, and new rifts open as quickly as they can be closed. An ideological conflict on how to deal with the crisis created the two factions, with Guardians praying to their absentee gods and Defiants attempting to repair the veil with powerful machines. This creative story in a familiar setting works in *Rift*'s favor: I actually felt as though I'd seen it before the rifts tore the world asunder.

I felt as though I'd seen this world before it was torn asunder.

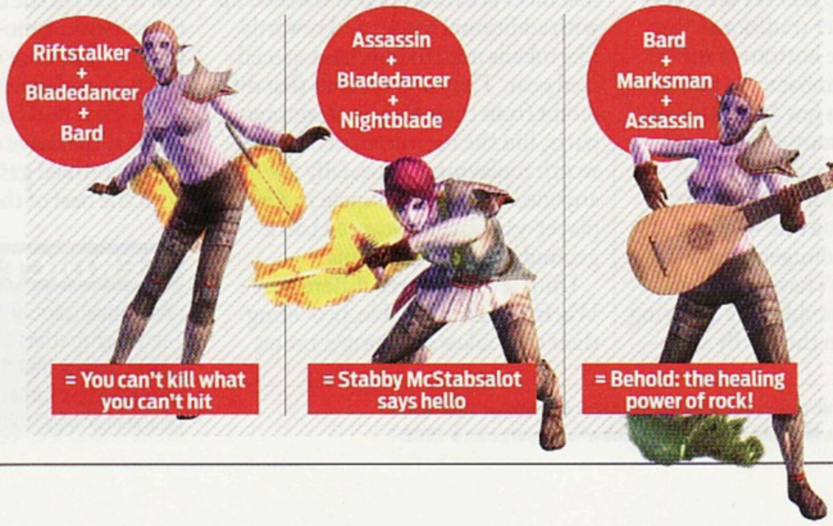
Rip a new one

Fundamentally, *Rift*'s rifts are an evolution of the public questing system that has become prevalent in MMOs, putting major, memorable battles in public areas that you don't have to quest for an hour or more to reach. Sealing one involves a multi-part mission that anyone who happens to be nearby can take part in, defeating waves of foes that grow exponentially more difficult and scale to the number of players involved.

If left unchecked, rifts spawn invasions: groups of enemies that set their sights on nearby towns. Once there, they'll kill quest-givers in the area and set up a base until players liberate it. This could have ended badly for Trion, since players usually consider anything that stops them from turning in quests to be effectively design-level griefing. This time, though, that method of design helps sell the idea of a dynamic world at war. When I return to a quest-giver to find that fire demons have set up camp on his corpse, when I'm told that I need to exterminate the beasties for him to respawn and pay me. The game rewards players for evicting these squatters, so I don't mind the extra work.

This same concept extends to the zone-wide events that regularly occur in Telara, popping up as frequently as hourly (depending on the total players in a zone). Without warning, one of the elemental planes can begin a full-blown invasion, marching armies out of dozens of rifts and into cities. Without orga-

Shades of Rogue Fill any role with proper use of Souls


Riftstalker + Bladedancer + Bard
= You can't kill what you can't hit
Assassin + Bladedancer + Nightblade
= Stabby McStabsalot says hello
Bard + Marksman + Assassin
= Behold: the healing power of rock!

PvP Do's and Don'ts How to achieve victory in each of Telara's four Warfronts

The Black Garden (Keepaway)

DO: Capture the Fang of Regulos—it gives you points the longer you hold it
DON'T: Run away with it—stay in the middle of the map for more points

The Codex (Capture Point)

DO: Capture the Codex flag first—it's worth the most points
DON'T: *Only* capture the Codex—you'll need more points to win

Whitefall Steppes (Capture the Flag)

DO: Make sure your flag is defended—the best offense is a good defense
DON'T: Stay in the base—a 10-minute-long zero/zero game is boring

Battle for Port Scion (Objectives)

DO: Defeat the enemy commander—take him down and it's game over
DON'T: Get lost—it's a big city, and you don't want to find yourself alone

nized player resistance, an event can be over in minutes, but when everyone works together the outcome is extraordinary. Watching hundreds of allies take down bosses or destroy bases is exhilarating every single time, especially considering the potential to earn rare gear.

Know your role

Not every moment is spent fighting extra-planar invasions. *Rift* is a full MMO beyond the portals, with rewarding crafting and a massive number of NPCs that need help collecting flowers, killing boars, and breaking stuff. Quests are varied, if somewhat uninspired, and my quest log was always full of missions spread out over a number of zones, giving me plenty of options and making grinding for XP unnecessary.

The 100-or-so hours it takes to hit the level cap (50) would be typical if not for the rifts, but considering there are usually at least three or four open at any given time in every zone, the path to the cap is never boring—unless you consider traditional "hit the buttons on the bottom of the screen" MMO combat to be tedious.

Having played a few MMOs in my time, I went in assuming the usual shortage of healers and created a Cleric as my first *Rift* character to avoid having to find one whenever I wanted to enter a dungeon. As it turned out, I didn't have to.

Rift solves this problem by allowing players to adapt on the fly. By swapping between customizable "Roles" at any given time, the classes (Rogue, Cleric, Warrior and Mage) can adopt sub-classes called Souls. By combining three Souls into a Role, a tank can turn into a healer and a damage-dealer can become a tank without giving up the traits that make the classes distinct. My Cleric tank, for example, can buff his stats to double his armor, add a big chunk of health to his pool, *and* heal.

Rift solves problems by allowing players to adapt on the fly.

I love that I don't need to have multiple characters to experience the different elements of the game, though I do wish I could tie armor and weapons to the different Roles to completely transform my character without manually swapping out my wardrobe each time. Still, the ability to run dungeons with almost any party makeup beats the hell out of trying to recruit perfect groups.

Once you hit the level cap a new set of quests open up (some of which require raids of 10 or more players to complete), and all of the lower-level instances are revamped and scaled up with additional bosses and rewards like tokens used to purchase specialized gear. They don't feel all that different from their low-level counterparts, but the incentives make them worth replaying—especially for anyone looking to compete in *Rift's* player-vs.-player instanced battlegrounds, called Warfronts.

Until level 50, three different Warfronts are available, providing their own takes on capture-point, CTF, and keep-away gameplay. The fourth Warfront, Battle for Port Scion, is only available to level 50 characters, and it's a PvP fan's dream. Set in an enemy-occupied city, players earn points by completing objectives, defeating powerful, high-level NPCs and summoning support characters—all while doing battle with other players. Here's the kicker: killing the enemy faction doesn't directly earn points. This emphasis on teamwork over ganking leads to more strategic battles—an accomplishment that other PvP-focused MMOs should really take to heart.

Open the rift

Virtually all of Trion's concepts in *Rift* have paid off, and instead of turning out cheap or punishing, these features help make this world feel epic and rewarding. Rifts are undoubtedly the best execution of public quests to date. They make exhilarating experiences like slaying massive golems from the Plane of Earth part of the daily routine, and the massive, zone-wide events feel unique. The core experience of the MMO hasn't been reinvented, but *Rift's* ideas build on the concepts of MMOs that have come before it, creating a refined game that can stand with the best of the genre. ■

◆ **Price** $50 plus $15/month subscription ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Trion Worlds
◆ **Developer** Trion Worlds **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** www.riftgame.com ◆ **ESRB** T

VERDICT

Absolutely colossal, *Rift* aims high and hits its mark, proving that there's room to grow within the traditional MMO format.

PC GAMER **85**

He's tiny compared to other event bosses.

Death plane invasion, eh? I've got this.

A singing voice so bad, it tears dimensions.

That's the second-biggest centaur I've ever seen!

Robot horses: better than real horses.

Now is the hour, riders of Rift-han!

Like evil aurora borealis, rifts start off looking kinda pretty.

EDGY

Recruit an army, liberate Rome, and wear awesome robes in **ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD** *by Tyler Wilde*

Need to know

What is it?
Open-world stealth action amidst a bloody political war in Renaissance Rome, tucked into a sci-fi thriller

Influenced by
Thief, Grand Theft Auto III

Play it on
Dual-core 2.6GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GTX/ Radeon HD 4870

Alternatively
Splinter Cell: Conviction (87%)

Copy protection
Online activation

The most important thing you need to know before starting *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* is that, after the first hour, you're never forced to man any more asinine cannons. Don't be discouraged by the frustratingly pointless, cinematic-heavy introduction, because everything after that is compelling. I couldn't stay mad at the game for long—not after nimbly scaling Rome's famous Coliseum and flicking my blade into the necks of three hapless gunmen, all entirely undetected. *Brotherhood*'s massive and complex open world is an engrossing, blood-soaked playground.

Future-past balderdash

Brotherhood picks up where *Assassin's Creed II* left off, with late-fifteenth-century master assassin Ezio having just defeated a sickeningly corrupt pope. He returns home safely, but is inexplicably surprised the next day when the pope's son interrupts his awkwardly animated sex scene with an army. Cue the awful cannons!

After a tedious segment outside of the Animus (a sci-fi device through which the series' true protagonist relives his assassin ancestors' memories), Ezio travels to Rome to dislodge the tyrannical establishment. It's here that the open-world game starts for real, and the plot congeals.

As in *AC2*, the story progresses through a series of Ezio's memories. The missions are varied sequences of stealth, combat, and story-driving dialog, and even the seemingly garden-variety escort missions are well done. It's hard to be bored while leaping across rooftops with knives.

The free-running and combat do take effort to master. Early in the game I was tasked with chasing down and tackling a pickpocket, so I sprinted into a crowd, fell over, jumped into a pile of hay, and stuck my hidden blade through the throat of a woman carrying her groceries. The more I played, though, the more impressive (and less unintentionally amusing) my acrobatics became. They'd have been a little more impressive, though, without the game's few irksome graphical glitches—like pop-ins that once warped a hostile guard directly in front of me while I was being sneaky.

Aside from the story missions, *Brotherhood* builds on *AC2*'s huge list of optional things to do: violently taking over enemy territory, recruiting and managing ally assassins, investing in property—I got happily lost in its time-sink vortex for hours, and more hours still were spent amusing myself by free-running through Rome and beating up guards for no reason. The single-player offers at least 15 hours of quality assassinatin'—and if you tire of that, there's also the brand-new multiplayer modes.

Simple sophistication

These multiplayer matches are simple but challenging stealth manhunts, either as lone-wolf assassins or teams of killers (you're given a target to assassinate, while another player hunts you). You know what your target looks like and their general direction, but the catch is that maps are populated with look-alike civilians; the trick is to lose your pursuer in the crowd while watching for unusual activity from your target, making this well-designed, paranoia-inducing cat-and-mouse game far more than just a bullet point on the box. I did experience occasional, inexplicable crashes, however.

Overshadowing even that, *Brotherhood*'s biggest improvement is that it requires only one-time activation, as opposed to *AC2*'s "always-online" DRM. The game itself isn't notably superior (especially in terms of story), but all of its additions put it at least on par with the last, and it's a hugely entertaining sequel. ■

The Assassins' handbook

From a ledge, Ezio grabs, stabs and tosses his unsuspecting victim

The dual hidden blades literally *double* face stabbing efficiency

Why not make a friend and hide his body at the same time?

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ubisoft ◆ **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft Annecy ◆ **Multiplayer** 8 players ◆ **Link** http://assassinscreed.us.ubi.com/brotherhood ◆ **ESRB** M

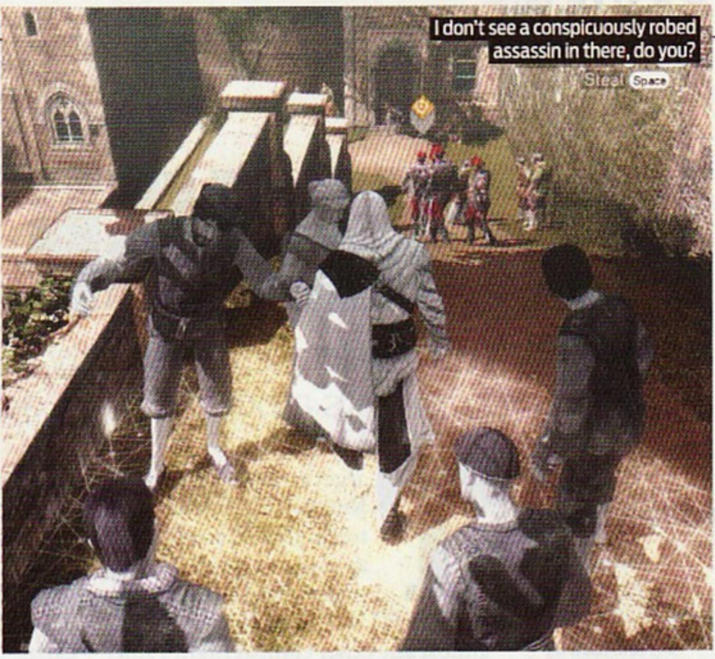
VERDICT

An exhilarating adventure teeming with unique things to see and do—and most importantly, people to stab.

PC GAMER 86

E
Attack
Shift
Swap we
Kick
Space

Chaining together one-hit assassinations downs entire platoons in seconds.

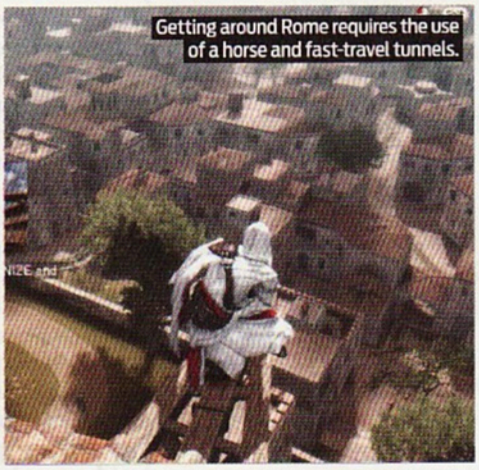

Steal
Space

I don't see a conspicuously robed assassin in there, do you?

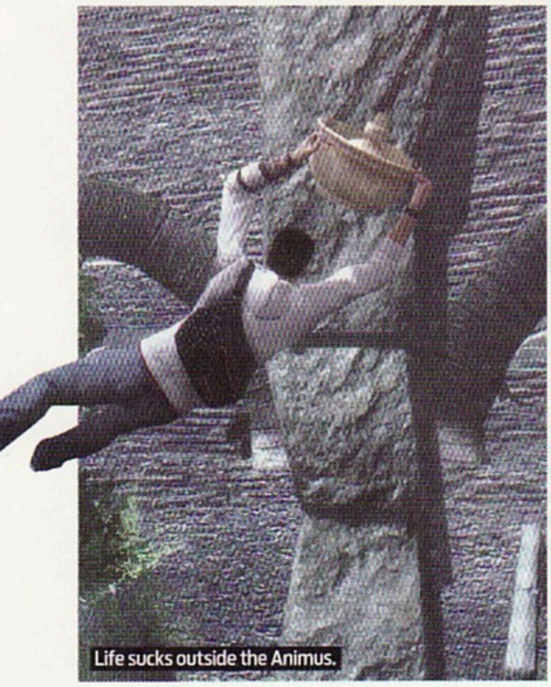
E
Shift
Space
o Flee
CATIONS

Destroy the enemy cannons.

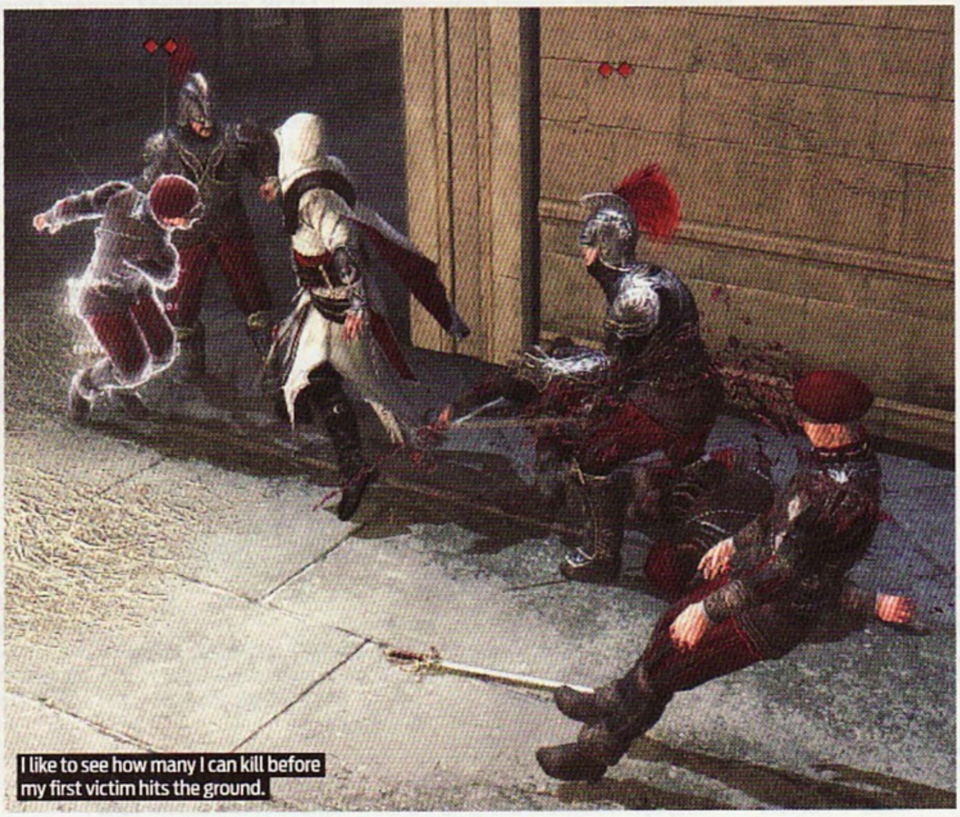
The neighbors are here, and they look angry.



Getting around Rome requires the use of a horse and fast-travel tunnels.



Life sucks outside the Animus.



I like to see how many I can kill before my first victim hits the ground.

HOG HEAVEN

PC GAMER
EDITOR'S CHOICE
★★★★★

Damnably authentic and endlessly intense, **DCS: A-10C WARTHOG** delivers a potent payload ***by Andy Mahood***

Need to know

What is it?
A realistic, modern jet study simulation
Influenced by
Flanker 2.0
Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GTX/Radeon HD 4870
Alternatively
Lock On: Flaming Cliffs 2 (90%)
Copy protection
Online activation (ProActive AAA)
Check out
Download the manual PDF http://bit.ly/DCSman

Target acquired! A line of Russian T-72B tanks, teasingly stationary against the spinach-green plain, lights up my A-10C's HUD. If I was playing almost any other combat flight game, I would likely press a key or two to lock on, then squeeze a joystick button to deposit a 1,000-pound CBU-97 cluster bomb on the enemy.

I'm not playing a "game," though. I'm playing Eagle Dynamics' meticulously authentic *DCS: A-10C Warthog* simulation, and establishing a firing solution on those tanks is serious business. Set the appropriate CBU-97 ordnance on the left multi-function display stores management page with a series of button presses; configure release parameters (ripple settings, time of fall, minimum altitude, eject velocity, escape maneuver) with several more virtual button and switch clicks; cycle master mode control to CCIP (Constantly Computed Impact Point) bombing; enter a shallow dive toward the tanks; and release the bomb when the CCIP pipper in the HUD hits the sweet spot. The kills you work for are the most satisfying.

Heaven in the sky

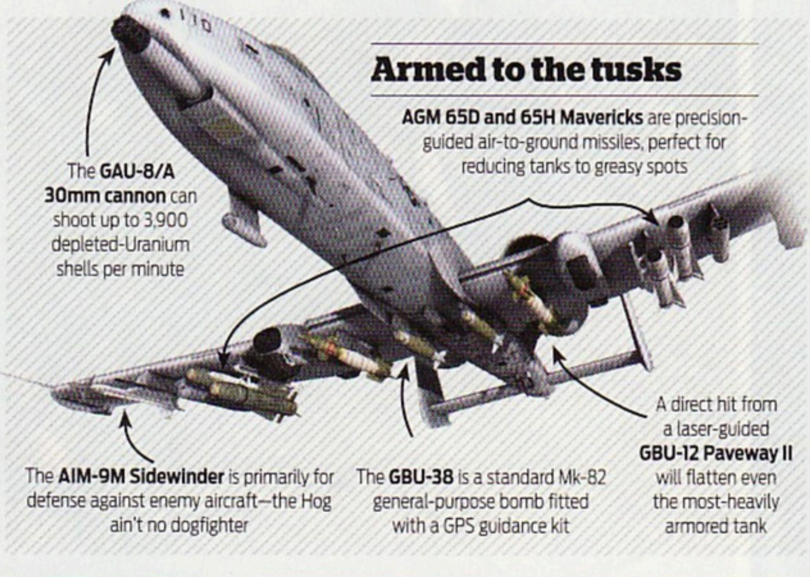
All of this can be confusing and exhausting for flight sim neophytes—doubly so in the heat of battle—but for the perpetually demanding hardcore simulation crowd, *DCS: A-10C* represents combat-flight nirvana. Every single switch, gauge, button and display in the fully clickable virtual cockpit is completely functional, while the (almost) classified avionics and high-fidelity flight modeling deliver piloting challenges rarely seen outside of a full-dome, military-grade cockpit simulator. Superficially, everything from its 100,000-polygon aircraft models and intricate damage system to its expansive HDR-enhanced Crimean Peninsula terrain graphics is absolutely gob-smackingly gorgeous.

It's not completely inaccessible, for those willing to learn. A terrific set of interactive, narrated training missions and animated control cues provides a great starting point. An "active pause" cheat that lets you stop in mid-air to flip switches and configure your weapons is another godsend—it gives you time to pore over the nearly 900-pages of PDF manuals for hints. There's also a "game mode" option that lightens the workload (but don't expect arcade-game simplicity). Eventually, jet-jock wannabes can perform anything from cold engine start-ups to bitch-slapping Russian tanks with a laser-guided Paveway.

When you're ready, *A-10C* has 19 standalone missions and three linear—albeit randomized—campaigns that boast enough contiguous AI action to seriously distract you en route to your own mission goals. Toss in a convenient random mission-generator, a mission editor with its own precipitous learning curve, and a co-op multiplayer game for up to 32 players (sadly not compatible with *DCS: Black Shark* yet) and *A-10C* is easily the most feature-packed combat jet-study simulation since 1998's *Falcon 4.0*.

DCS: A-10C Warthog isn't for everyone—this is a simulation that demands dedication to reveal its true worth, and only those prepared to put in the time and effort to mine its treasure trove of avionics challenges will see that reward. The Hog is a relatively easy aircraft to fly, but doing so while battling armed forces with this brutally realistic weapons delivery platform is one of the most challenging—and intensely satisfying—undertakings you'll ever face in a PC flight sim. ■

Armed to the tusks



AGM 65D and 65H Mavericks are precision-guided air-to-ground missiles, perfect for reducing tanks to greasy spots

The **GAU-8/A 30mm cannon** can shoot up to 3,900 depleted-Uranium shells per minute

A direct hit from a laser-guided **GBU-12 Paveway II** will flatten even the most-heavily armored tank

The **AIM-9M Sidewinder** is primarily for defense against enemy aircraft—the Hog ain't no dogfighter

The **GBU-38** is a standard Mk-82 general-purpose bomb fitted with a GPS guidance kit

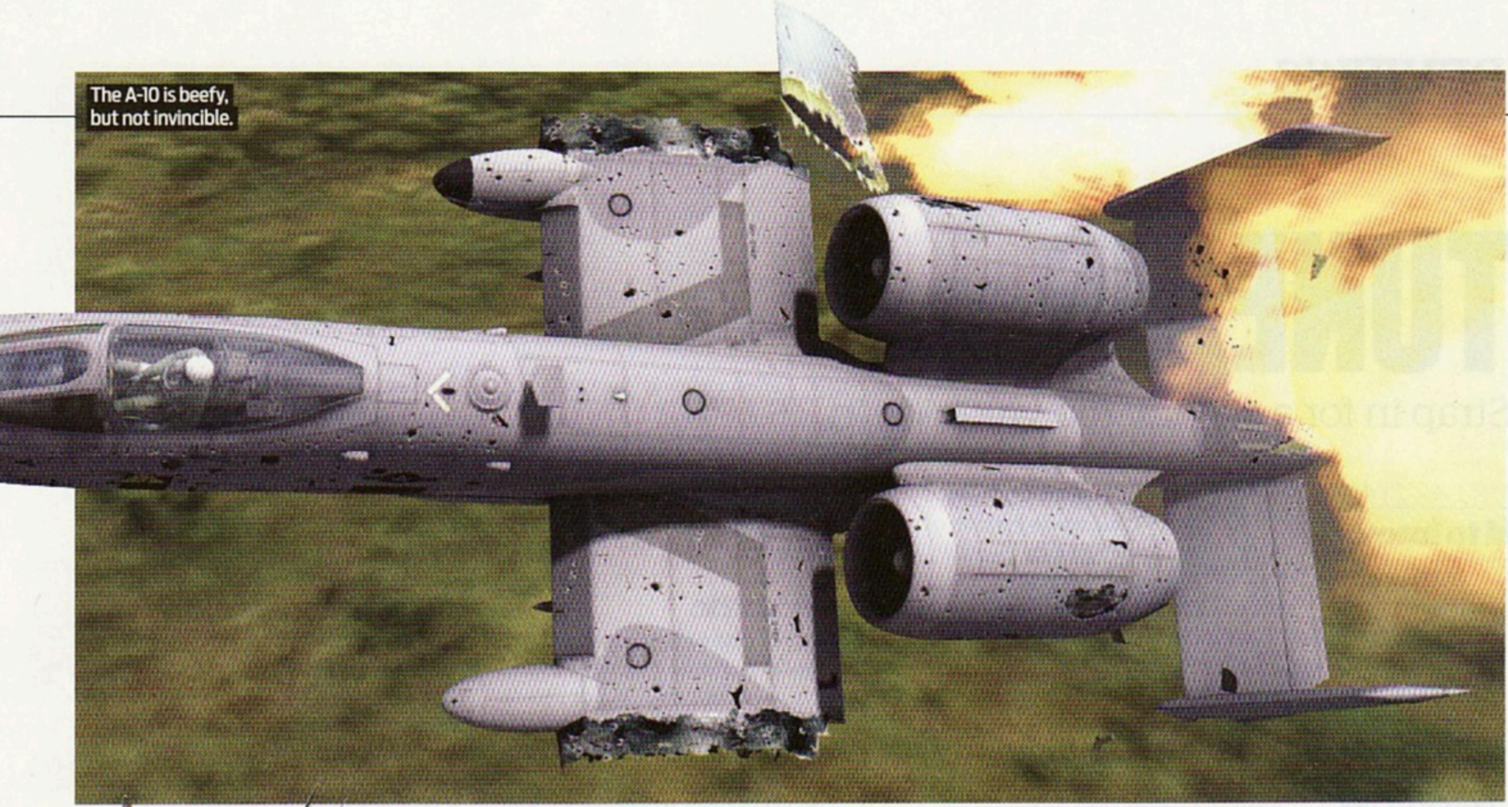
For the hardcore sim crowd, *DCS: A-10C Warthog* represents combat-flight nirvana.

◆ **Price** $60 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** The Fighter Collection ◆ **Developer** Eagle Dynamics
◆ **Multiplayer** 32 players, versus or co-op ◆ **Link** www.digitalcombatsimulator.com **ESRB** T

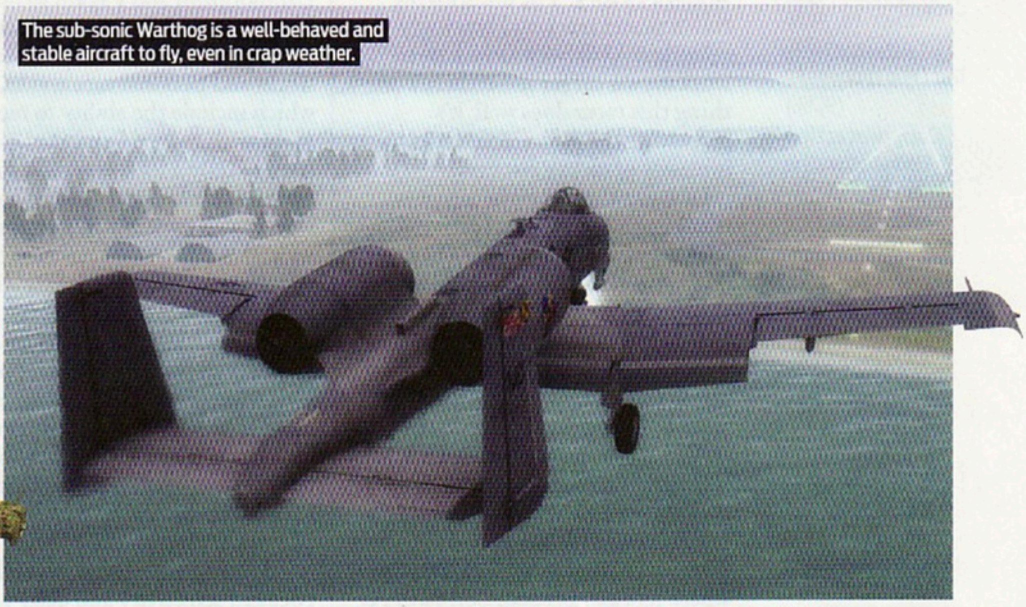
VERDICT

The most exhaustively detailed, realistic combat jet simulation you'll find outside of a classified U.S. military facility.

PC GAMER **92**


The A-10 is beefy, but not invincible.

I'm happy to help you test that ejector seat.


The sub-sonic Warthog is a well-behaved and stable aircraft to fly, even in crap weather.

A paint job only a mama warthog could love.

This is how it's *really* done, *Modern Warfare*.

Make a left at Albequerquistan.

Oh, so *that*'s what happens if I push the big red button.

FIRE CAPS PULL
SBY AIR
ACTIVE
A2402120

TUNE-UP

Strap in for a slightly-too-wild ride in **SHIFT 2 UNLEASHED** *by Andy Mahood*

Need to know

What is it?
A high-speed sports car racing game
Influenced by
Need for Speed Hot Pursuit, GTR2
Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce GTX 260/ Radeon HD 4870
Alternatively
Test Drive Unlimited 2 (90%)
Copy protection
Online activation

A full lap around *Shift 2 Unleashed*'s version of Germany's 13-mile Nürburgring Nordschleife (the "Green Hell") can take a heavy toll on a driver. Afterward, my shoulder muscles ached from leaning in toward the screen and my eyes were red and bleary from concentration, but I prized my third-place finish as I would a victory. The unforgiving rollercoaster track and bracingly relentless AI drivers forced me to work my ass off for it—if there's one thing this racer does well, it's recreating the physical and mental intensity of racing fast cars.

I'd spent the last eight minutes manhandling my on-screen McLaren MP4-12C—the über-quick machine the game lent me for this challenge—through the Nordschleife's infamously perilous bends, rises and descents. There are no exploding buildings or performance-boosting power-ups to distract me here: just me, my opponents, and the dizzying blur of once-sharply defined pavement as I accelerate out of the Nordschleife's famed Carousel corner. *Shift 2* carries on where its 2009 predecessor, *Need For Speed Shift*, left off: with a welcome push towards realistic sim-like racing action.

Sim-centric

That push begins with optional performance-degrading damage modeling (entirely your choice, but meant for advanced drivers) on the stable of over 140 cars, which range from car-porn manufacturers like Bugatti, Lamborghini and Pagani to ho-hum Hondas and Volkswagens. It continues on the three dozen-plus real-world and fictional race tracks, which include the ability to race at night with reduced visibility—even though only a fool would do so—and the subtly shaky helmet-cam view is a remarkably immersive and addictive way to experience racing.

It doesn't push far enough with the controls, however. The arcade feel gives *Shift 2* away as a *Need for Speed* game, even though EA's dropped the series' moniker. This is a gamepad racer at heart, but an Xbox controller's analog thumbsticks may be too twitchy to maintain proper control. I traded up for a longer-throw Microsoft Sidewinder joystick (a good racing wheel with carefully tweaked sensitivity and dead-zone adjustments also works, and most are supported) to minimize the annoying "tank slapper" effect, where cars tend to pivot on a central axis, exacerbating a dangerous side-to-side oscillation through the faster corners. Fine control is essential, as hitting one of the Velcro-like barriers or consistently aggressive AI cars can quickly end your race. (There isn't much difference between the physics of the novice and elite difficulty levels, sadly.)

Plugged-in hybrid

When you go online and connect with the Autolog servers, *Shift 2* manages a pleasantly lag-free ranked or unranked racing experience for up to 12 players in conventional races, time attack contests, "catchup" events or one-on-one driver duels. It's nothing fantastically exciting or unexpected, but everything is where it should be. EA and UK developer Slightly Mad Studios—one-time brain trust behind SimBin's *GTR* and *GTR2* simulations—also amped up the game's multiplayer dynamic by integrating the "trounce your online friends" career-tracking Autolog feature, last seen in *Need For Speed Hot Pursuit*. It's a feature that I have no interest in, but Facebook fanatics will likely eat it up.

Shift 2's strength, both online and off, is in how its crisp graphics and smooth frame rates communicate a convincing sense of velocity, and its immersive career mode delivers consistent challenge. Once you filter out the sometimes-misbehaving and obnoxiously drift-encouraging physics, *Shift 2*'s compelling high-speed driving trials should keep you coming back for more. ■

The arcade feel gives *Shift 2* away as a *Need for Speed* game.

Four corners of the world

Shift 2 Unleashed features beautifully rendered versions of some of the world's most famous circuits, with some of the most challenging corners any driver will ever face

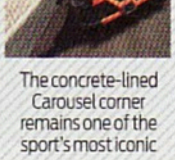
Spa Eau Rouge

Spa's famed Eau Rouge uphill sweeper requires courage and blind faith

Laguna Corkscrew

Laguna Seca's spectacular Corkscrew turn drops seven full stories

Nordschleife Carousel



The concrete-lined Carousel corner remains one of the sport's most iconic

Monza Parabolica

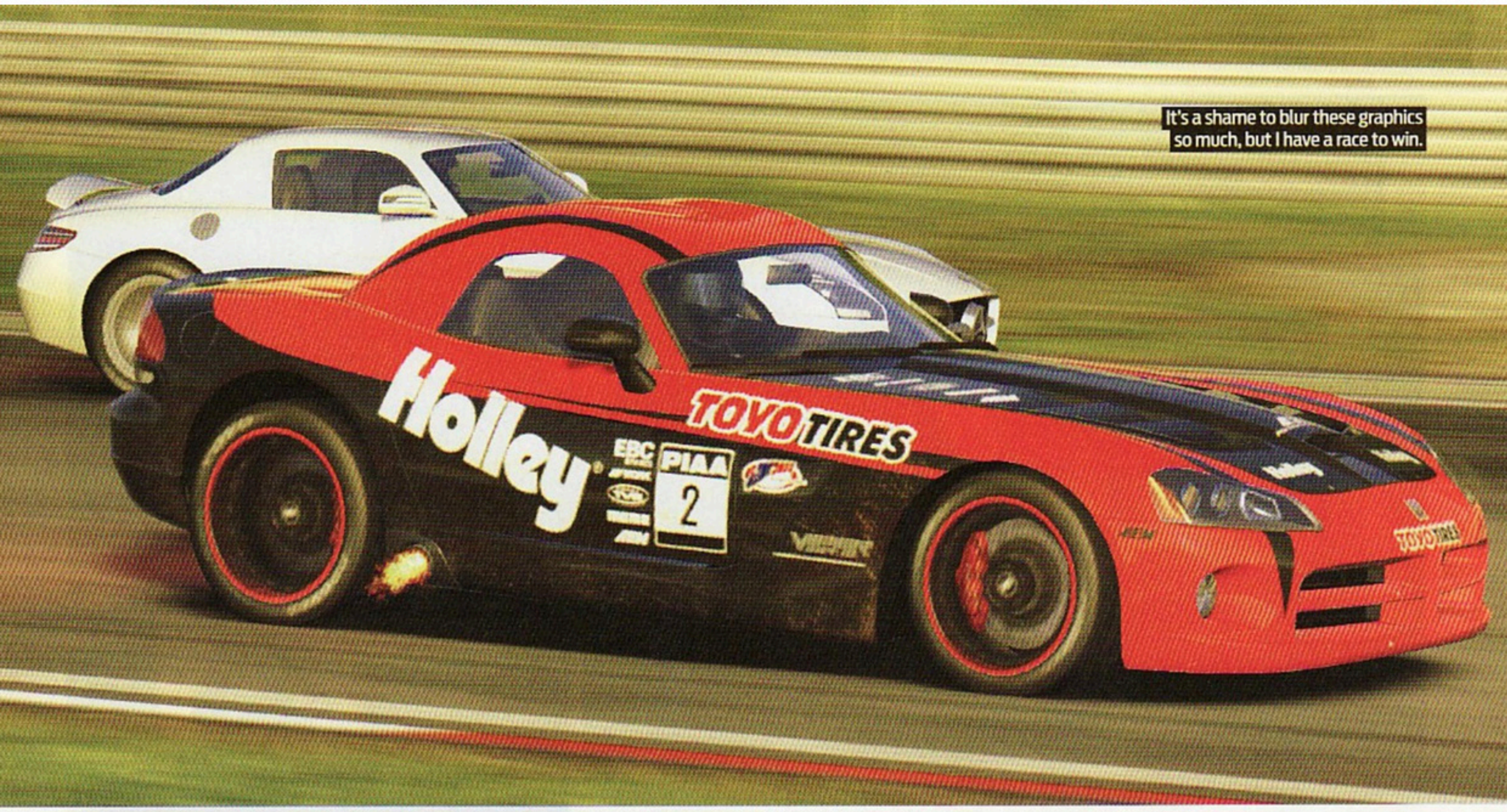
Monza's sweeping Parabolica corner demands precision and a heavy right foot

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ◆ **Developer** Slightly Mad Studios ◆ **Multiplayer** 12 players ◆ **Link** www.needforspeed.com/shift2unleashed ◆ **ESRB** E

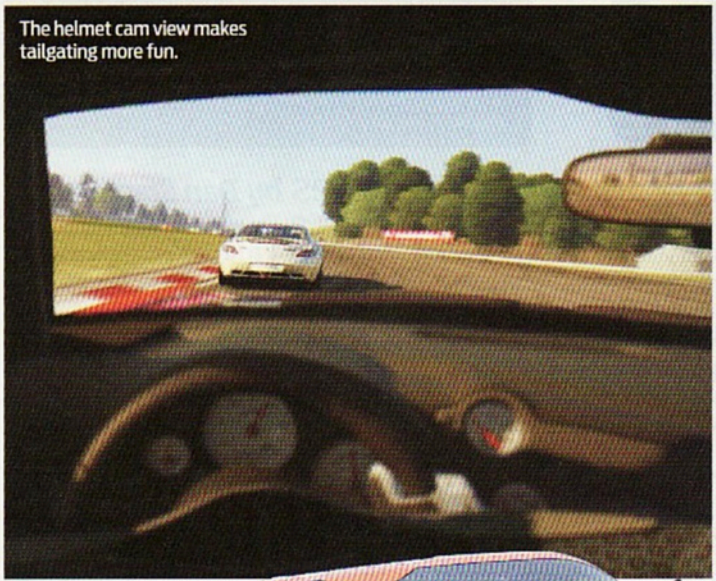
VERDICT

A hybrid sim/arcade racer that challenges and entertains, despite controls that must be tweaked into submission.

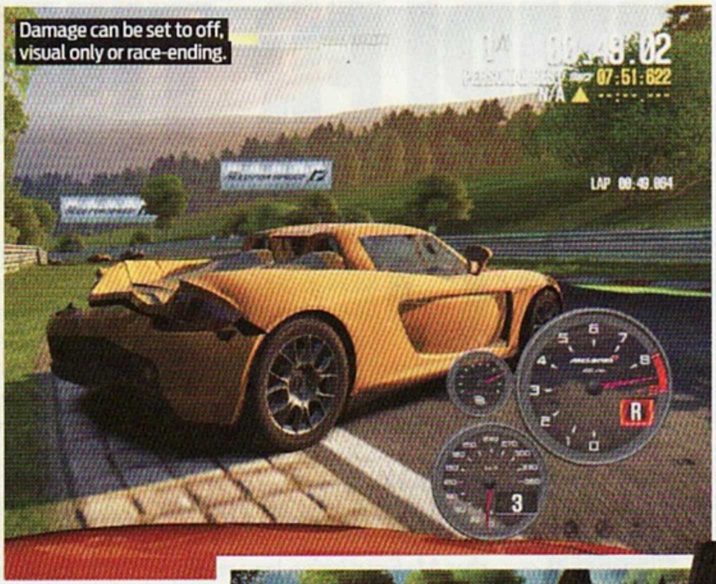
PC GAMER **82**


Holley
TOYO TIRES
PIAA
2
TOYO TIRES

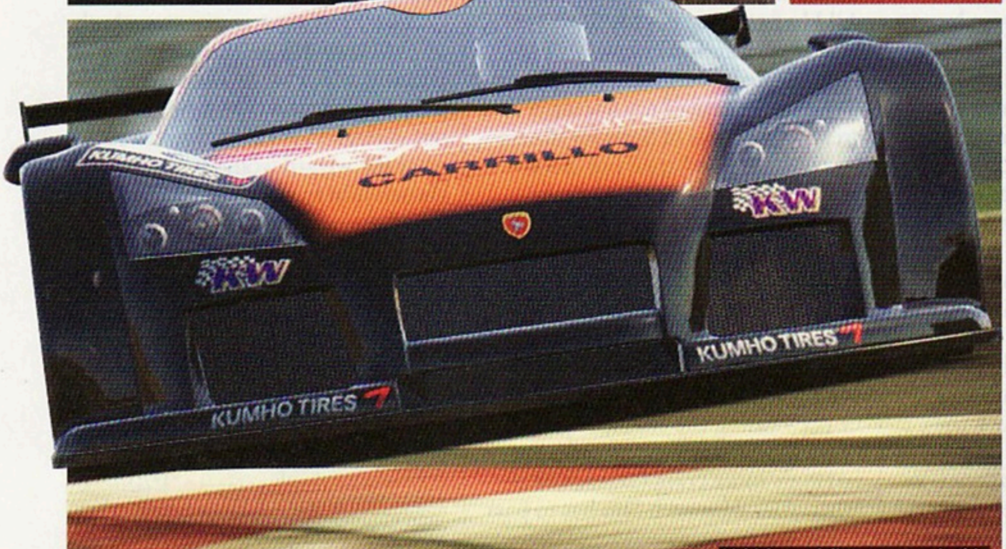
It's a shame to blur these graphics so much, but I have a race to win.



The helmet cam view makes tailgating more fun.

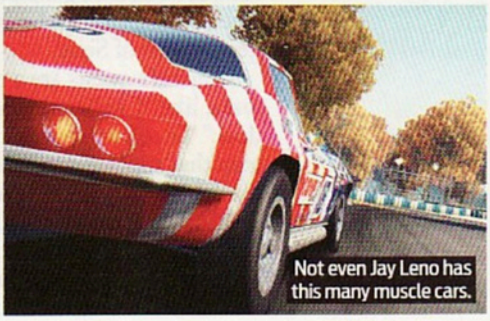

07:51:622
N/A
LAP 00:49.064
R
3

Damage can be set to off, visual only or race-ending.


CARRILLO
KUMHO TIRES
KW
KUMHO TIRES
KUMHO TIRES

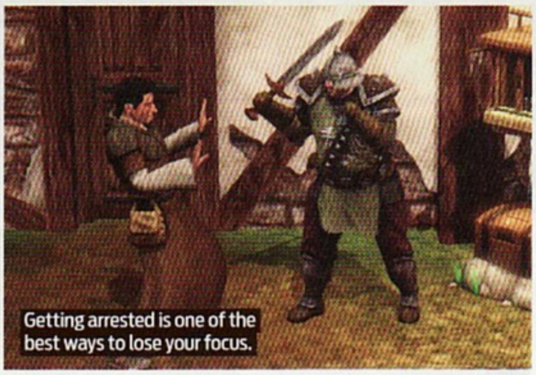
Vehicle modeling—as seen in this 200-mph Gumbert Apollo—is exquisite.

You can tell how fast a car is by the number of half-naked women standing next to it.



Not even Jay Leno has this many muscle cars.

You don't need to lock these Sims in a closet to kill them—a sword will do.


Getting arrested is one of the best ways to lose your focus.

SIMPLER TIMES

THE SIMS MEDIEVAL trades an open world for funny tales *by Dan Stapleton*

Need to know

What is it?
A choose-your-own-adventure game with virtual people in a fantasy realm

Play it on:
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GT/Radeon HD 3850

Influenced by
The Sims 3, King Arthur

Alternatively
The Sims 3 (92%)

Copy protection
Disc check

Once upon a time, there was a game called *The Sims Medieval*. Set in a picturesque fantasy kingdom of kings, knights and wizards, *Medieval* told many a charming and off-the-wall humorous tale of its people and their lives. It's just that there wasn't much *game* to it.

It's both a strength and a failing that *Medieval* isn't a lazy re-skinning of *The Sims 3*. It's driven by one of the least challenging parts of *Sims 3*: quests, which usher your chosen "hero" Sims—including a spy, a blacksmith, a priest and seven others—through a series of brain-dead simple objectives. The new context works, but I don't like that it excludes so much of *The Sims'* standard sandbox gameplay, like free construction and raising new generations of Sims.

Medieval's quests are a chain of tasks, like "Challenge Sim X to a duel." To solve this, you click the icon that appears over the target Sim's head and select "Challenge to duel" from the menu. They duel, and it gives you another task: "Tell the Monarch you won," which you solve in exactly the same way as the duel task. A trained monkey could play 90 percent of this, and it only gets slightly trickier when you're given two Sims to manage at once.

Easy win

It didn't take me long to figure out how to easily max out my Sim's performance meter nearly every time. All I had to do to get my Sim "focused" was do a couple of compulsory profession-related tasks per day—in the case of my doctor, it was treating a couple of Sims for illness by collecting and applying blood-sucking leeches in a super-basic minigame and crafting medicine from gathered herbs—and then satisfy his most basic needs by buying him a comfy bed and strolling into the off-map village market to buy some pigeon meat for soup. He doesn't even need to bathe or pee—using the chamber pot is entirely voluntary. A few tasks are jarringly more complex, such as when your Monarch Sim has to pass an edict—I still don't completely understand this process, but it's got a lot to do with bribery.

It ends up as more of an interactive choose-your-own-adventure than a game, and that's where *Medieval's* treasure lies. Stories are often light and goofy, with typical E-rated *Sims* fare; at others, they're full of delightfully dark humor, with summary executions, dire chinchillas, assassinations and organ theft.

Once I got some momentum built up, *Medieval* did get me happily clicking ahead to see what would happen next, and the stories branch out enough that I'm curious to see what the wizard would've done had I chosen him to solve the "Talking Frog" quest rather than the doctor. While there may be tons of achievements to earn, without the freedom to build and live as you please, *Medieval* doesn't have the same lasting appeal as its parent game. ■

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ◆ **Developer** EA Sims
◆ **Multiplayer** No ◆ **Link** www.ea.com/the-sims-medieval ◆ **ESRB** T

VERDICT

More an interactive fairytale than a game, this *Sims* spinoff tells a good yarn but feels limited.

PC GAMER
70

tablets

[torture-tested]

watches

[dissected]

quadricopters

[explained]

crazy-ass saws

[We make no promises regarding either the proper or improper uses of reciprocating saws]

MAXIMUM TECH

The World of Personal Technology, Unleashed

On Newsstands NOW

www.MaximumTech.com

BLEAK

POST APOCALYPTIC MAYHEM gets awful mileage *by Lucas Sullivan*

In vehicular combat racing, only the strongest homemade war machines survive—and it's not looking good for *Post Apocalyptic Mayhem*, which drives like a junker.

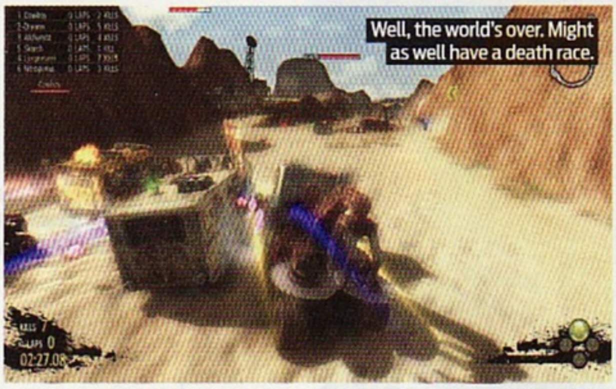
Six *Road Warrior*-style cars, each armed to the grill with jury-rigged barrel-launchers and flamethrowers, dash and destroy each other on one of only three tracks. After a few laps, I'm puzzled why *PAM*'s combat is soldered to a racing frame when its scoring system is so biased towards cars destroyed rather than who's in the lead. Why should I bother racing if kills are all that matter?

The tracks, which are brought to you by the color brown, look merely OK—none of the courses' set pieces or shortcuts really stick out, and each vista feels lifeless and desolate (at least it gets the post-apocalyptic vibe right). Every car has three unique but imbalanced power-ups: I raged profusely when my meth lab RV's pink flamingo grenades barely made a dent in my rival, a modified logging truck, before it ground me up with saw blades. Handling feels fine on a gamepad, but God help you if your bumper lightly grazes a slab of concrete—you'll spin out of control for what feels like days.

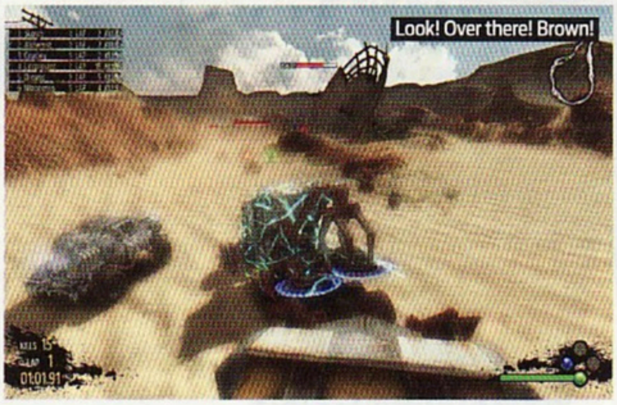
PAM's multiplayer offers a smidgen of fun, provided the group stays neck-and-neck—but with no analog to *Mario Kart*'s equalizing blue shell, any player with a decent lead will go unchallenged.

It's hard to justify paying even a budget price for a game in which I literally saw everything it had to offer (every vehicle, track, and weapon) in 100 minutes. This short ride's definitely a lemon. ■

PC GAMER 45



Well, the world's over. Might as well have a death race.



Look! Over there! Brown!

◆ **Price** $10 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Meridian 4 ◆ **Developer** Steel Monkeys ◆ **Multiplayer** 6 players ◆ **Link** www.meridian4.com/games/PAM ◆ **ESRB** N/A

HELL AGAIN

PAINKILLER: REDEMPTION is stuck in recycled hell *by Anthony Valva*

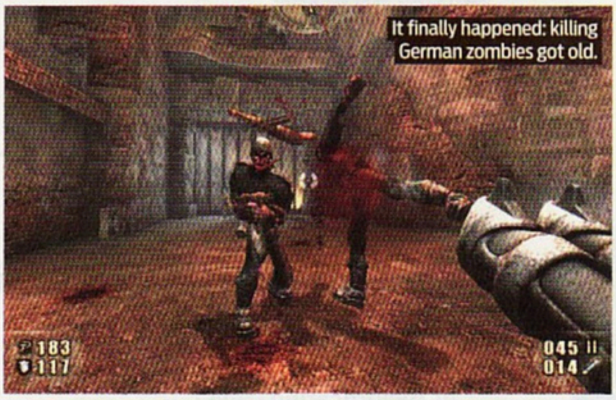
After many years of Catholic Bible study, I'd imagined hell to be a lot more diverse. According to the Gospel of *Painkiller: Redemption*, however, if you've shot your way through one room of demons, you've shot them all.

The original 2004 *Painkiller* earned a lot of love from shooter fans with its fast pace, huge enemy counts, memorable weapons and unapologetically gleeful violence. That love makes it all the more disappointing that this stand-alone expansion does nothing to "redeem" the series, only repeat it—badly. I spent the entire five-hour game simply entering a large, open space (usually just a giant square with the occasional ramp or pillar) killing waves of demons trucked in from previous *Painkiller* games, such as undead WWI soldiers, with weapons *also* from previous *Painkiller* games, like the Electrodriver, and then moving to the next area.

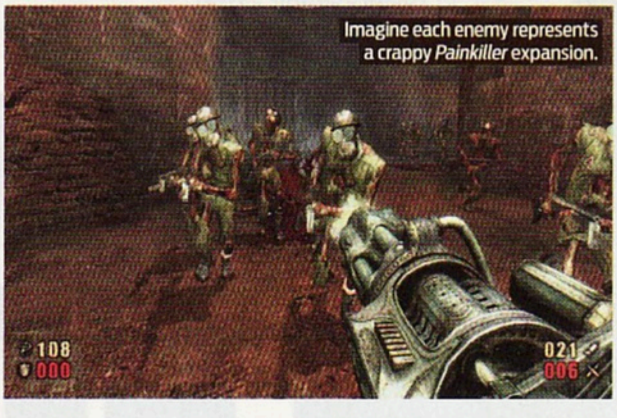
I barely noticed the graphical updates as I played—there's some extra detail to the environments and monsters, but going from 2004-era graphics to 2006-era graphics is nothing to get excited about. All of this is set to horrendous music that sounds like a looped one-minute demo track from your neighbor's kid's heavy metal garage band.

I'd feel dirty buying *Redemption* knowing there are great *Painkiller* mods, such as *Treasure Hunt* (http://bit.ly/pkthunt), that offer more original content than this expansion, for free. As much as I love impaling skeleton warriors with the Stake Gun, if I'm paying for this experience I want something new. ■

PC GAMER 40



It finally happened: killing German zombies got old.

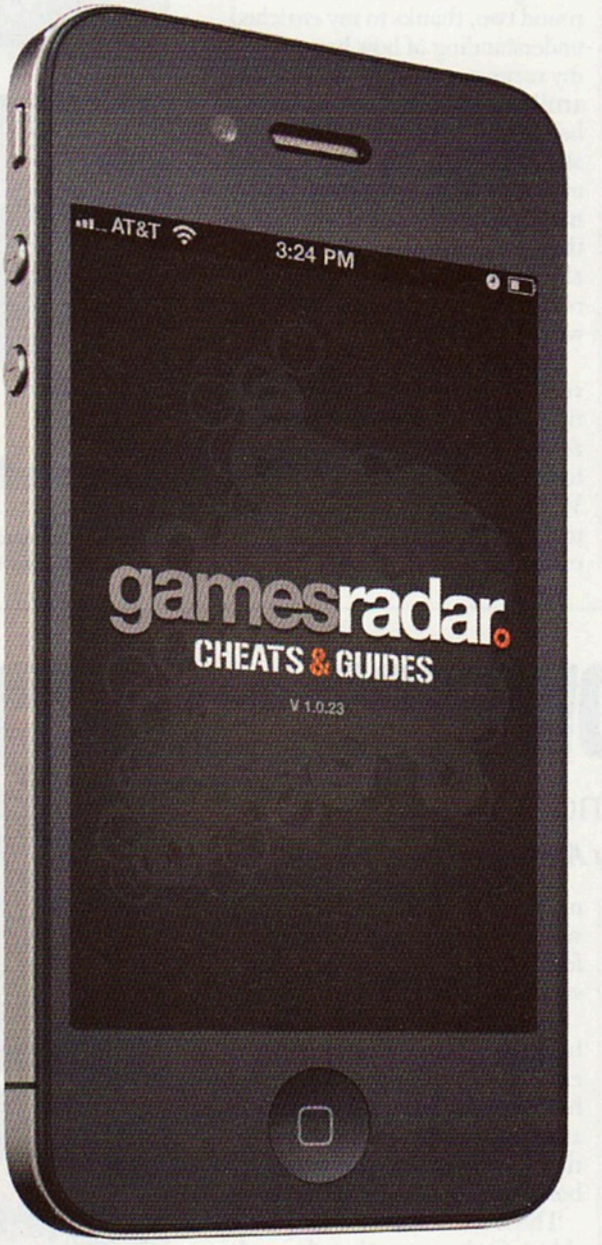


Imagine each enemy represents a crappy *Painkiller* expansion.

◆ **Price** $5 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** JoWood Entertainment ◆ **Developer** Eggtooth Team ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.jowood.com ◆ **ESRB** N/R

“★★★★★” Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz



“★★★★★ **THE BEST GUIDES** on the internet... **ALL IN ONE PLACE**”

by Samael76

“★★★★★ Thank you GamesRadar for **FEEDING MY ADDICTION**”

by Poconoscott

“★★★★★ GamesRadar is **FULL OF WIN**”

by Marcello Almaguer

“★★★★★ **AWESOMESAUCE!** Great app. I love!”

by June Martin

Think guidebooks are too heavy? Is your computer too far away from your console? Do you hate standing up? If so, download our gift to couch potatoes!

gamesradar. www.gamesradar.com

www.futureus.com Future MEDIA WITH PASSION

BRAIN STRAIN

ATOM ZOMBIE SMASHER's unpredictable undead are tricky *by Ryan Rigney*

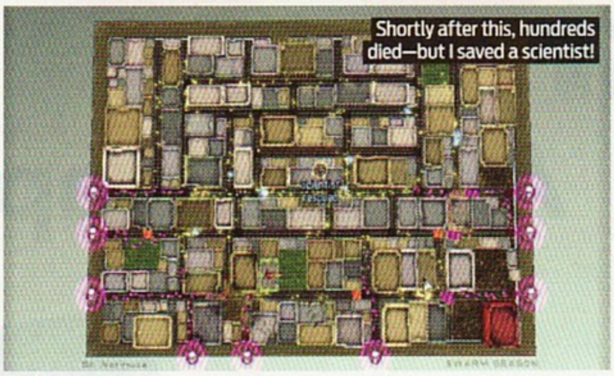
The mass of yellow civilians blindly flees around a corner, with a single purple zombie hot on their trail. From my god's-eye view I can only watch, and wish I could directly intervene to stop the naive masses before they charge head-long into the colossal pack of bloodthirsty infected directly ahead. My helicopter is en route for the pickup, but there are far too many trapped people to save in one trip. I frantically click to reposition my snipers, but they're too slow, and a single zombie slips through. In an instant, the entire mob of citizens turns purple. So. Many. Casualties.

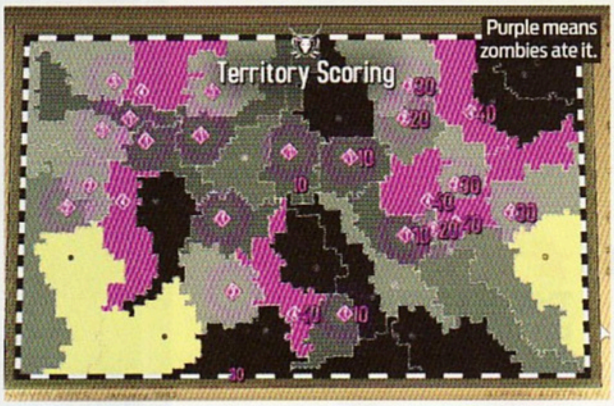
This sort of scenario was common during my frustrating first campaign in *Atom Zombie Smasher*. Having to learn the game's complex mechanics on the job led to the fall of territory after territory, and before long I found myself staring at a world map nearly devoid of humanity.

I began to see more success in round two, thanks to my enriched understanding of how best to utilize my various resources—land mines, artillery, etc.—but the zombies' behavior is so erratic and unpredictable that I had a hard time coming up with a winning strategy until I made multiple trial-and-error runs through each mission. Until then, all I could do was arbitrarily place roadblocks and mercenaries to see what would happen.

Still, successfully saving all survivors from a zone and turning the tide in the war against the great zombie menace is rewarding enough to keep me playing. Whoops—I lost a few too many cities again. New campaign. ■

PC GAMER **64**


Shortly after this, hundreds died—but I saved a scientist!



Purple means zombies ate it.

◆ **Price** $15 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Blendo Games ◆ **Developer** Blendo Games ◆ **Multiplayer** 3 players ◆ **Link** http://bit.ly/AZsmash ◆ **ESRB** NR

ROAD TO NOWHERE

CRASHER crashes and burns in an empty battle arena *by Anthony Valva*

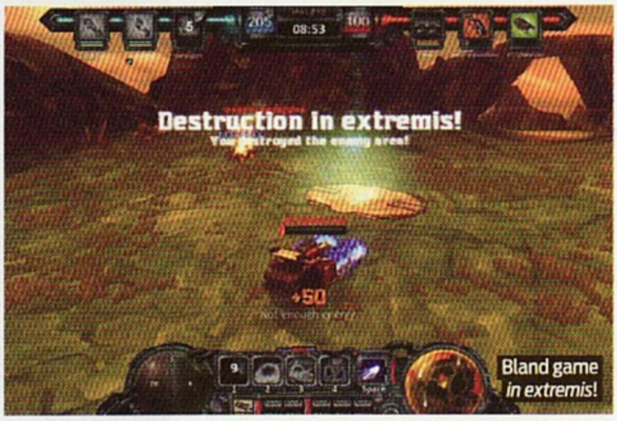
I weave my car between the smoldering piles of rubble that were once my rivals, but as the victory screen emerges, the void that should've been replaced with the thrill of a win remains a vacuum of boredom and dullness. *Crasher*'s claim to fame is that it's the first *motorized* multiplayer online battle arena, but that's all it has going for it.

Crasher can't figure out if it's going for the arcade style of the *Twisted Metal* games or the deceased driving MMO *Auto Assault*. Set up like a MMO battleground, it offers an assortment of armed vehicles, each intended to play a tanking, damage-dealing or support role in combat using uninspired special attacks, such as buffs that slow a target or pinpointed sniper shots. You can organize a team and plan a strategy around these classes, but it doesn't matter. Whether I played as a support car or a tank, neither one felt geared toward fulfilling their supposed roles.

The arenas themselves are large but bland. Take the canyon map for example: the developers seem to have created four distinct sections and copy/pasted those dozens of times, creating a repetitive and boring series of identical jumps.

Those are only concerns if you're able to find a game, though—as I am writing this, there are only 12 people playing *Crasher*. It took me half an hour just to get into a 3v3 match (the smallest possible game) and getting into a 5v5 seems nearly impossible. With no online community, no single-player gameplay and no replayability, *Crasher* has already crashed. ■

PC GAMER **35**



Bland game *in extremis!*

Insurance won't cover that.

◆ **Price** $15 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Punchers Impact ◆ **Developer** Mindscape ◆ **Multiplayer** 10 players ◆ **Link** www.crasher.com ◆ **ESRB** NR

That's a lot of droids! This old engine still has some cool tricks.

FORCED

LEGO STAR WARS III: THE CLONE WARS

is a few bricks short *by Lizzie Cuevas*

Abiding by the rule that states that everything based on the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy is disappointing, *LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars* can't recapture the charm of the original. This one transmogrifies the cast of LucasFilm's ongoing animated series, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, into cute LEGO brick-people and puts them into a platforming adventure parody built for one or two-player co-op, but bright colors and parody gags can't distract from its more aggravating flaws.

Control is a bit cumbersome, even with the gamepad it's obviously built for. You start with Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin Skywalker and Padmé Amidala, switching between them to use their unique abilities like Obi-Wan's lightsaber moves or Padmé's kinky chain whip to escape the Geonosian Arena, but switching characters is annoyingly tricky, since you have to chase them down and hit a button to swap bodies with the AI piloting them. Also, the lack of any real camera controls makes targeting certain enemies difficult—while hacking and slashing masses of droids into bumpy plastic bits with a lightsaber is easy, taking down an evasive four-eyed Nexu beast is frustrating—you have to blindly guess where it is when it runs off screen.

When a mission goes right, you're using the Force to arrange LEGO pieces and solve puzzles, or fighting cool bosses from the show such as Ventress and General Grievous. A few go wrong, though, suffering from a lack of *any* direction at all. In the "Duel of the Droids" mission, I got stuck because I needed a specific character I hadn't unlocked yet to hit a switch. Dead end—quit the mission and pick a new one.

When you *do* complete a mission, you unlock a new character (such as Yoda or a clone trooper) and gain more access to its wide array of skills and weapons, like Lightsaber Throw for Jedi characters or an electrical shock stun as a droid. There's plenty of overlap, however, and Jedi like Obi-Wan and Anakin share the same lightsaber moves and Force powers.

As a cap to the eight-hour campaign, there's a new competitive mode where you and a friend can race to collect LEGO studs or see who can destroy the most buildings. It's simple fun, but if you or a family member are into *Clone Wars*, simple fun is probably what you're after. ■

PC GAMER
65

◆ **Price** $30 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** LucasArts ◆ **Developer** Traveller's Tales ◆ **Multiplayer** 2 players, co-op and versus (local only) ◆ **Link** www.lucasarts.com/games/legostarwarsiii ◆ **ESRB** E 10+

Virtually Unlimited Entertainment

SOLITAIRE OVERLOAD PLUS
101 Mahjong · 202 Solitaire · 303 Tangram · 101 Picture Puzzles
ALMOST UNLIMITED PLAY!

ULTIMATE PUZZLE GAMES Sudoku Edition
Unlimited puzzles!
9 x 9 Grids, 8 x 8 Grids, 6 x 6 Grids, 4 x 4 Grids, Sudoku Solver, Difficulty Levels, Great 2 Player Modes, plus GAME SHARE!

SOLITAIRE OVERLOAD
101 GAMES
FreeCell • Klondike • Golf • Pyramid • Yukon • Spider ...and 95 more games!

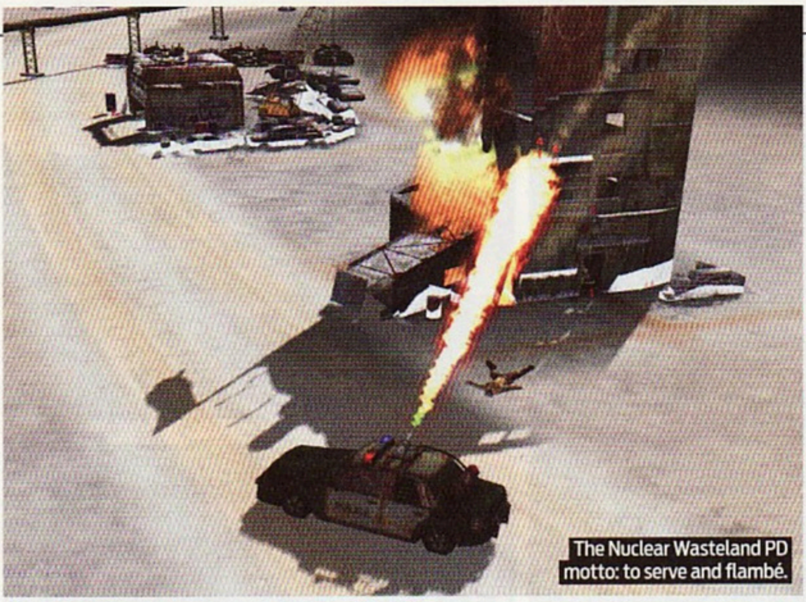
NOW available for iPad

All Games Designed with VUE™ Technology

EVERYONE E

AVAILABLE AT
BEST BUY · GameStop · amazon.com · TARGET

TELEGAMES®
Web site: www.telegames.com



The Nuclear Wasteland PD motto: to serve and flambé.

A POX INDEED

APOX brings something old, something borrowed...and that's it *by Rob Zacny*

Much like the patchwork weapons that do battle across its *Mad Max* wasteland, *APOX* is a Frankenstein monster of a real-time strategy game, assembled from pieces of better games—the micromanagement of *Men of War* and the pacing and tactics of *Company of Heroes*. The results: underwhelming.

There are no unit types in *APOX*, only soldiers and gear. Like action figures, you can swap them in and out of vehicles, put them in different stances and give them different weapons to define their combat role. You ignore these fussy details at your peril: producing units from a barracks is less efficient than sending unarmed recruits out to scavenge for weapons.

To its credit, this system allows for some dramatic moments, such as when an enemy armored car started slaughtering my infantry as their bullets plinked harmlessly off its plating. One of my riflemen crawled through the hail of gunfire toward a dead comrade who'd been carrying the squad's RPG. With allies dropping dead around him, he grabbed the RPG, rose to a crouch and heroically blasted the car to bits.

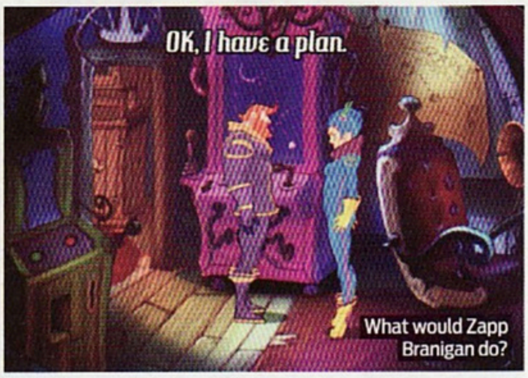
This attention to detail also adds a lot to the player's workload. For instance, units constantly run out of ammo in combat, and the only ways to resupply them are to scavenge from the dead, use other soldiers to shuttle ammo or have your army retreat to a nearby stockpile. You have to be careful with stockpiles, however, because they can strangle unit production, as supplies accumulate near the battlefront rather than back at your base. *APOX* is full of this babysitting, like when a soldier continues using his mortar in close combat. Your job is to select his knife for him. That's not strategy, and it's not tactics. It's busywork.

APOX is also encumbered with dull, generically post-apocalyptic art design, flat and lifeless sound effects and the most excruciating tutorials in RTS gaming. In a sadistic twist, most maps are locked until you earn credits by playing more *APOX*.

It is somewhat redeemed by co-op multiplayer, where the detail-oriented design makes more sense as players specialize in roles like armor or artillery to help their team. Finding good matches is not easy in *APOX*'s sluggish community, however, and I cannot fathom why anyone should play this instead of the exponentially better games that it tries to emulate. ■

PC GAMER 45

◆ **Price** $15 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** BlueGiant Interactive ◆ **Developer** BlueGiant Interactive
◆ **Multiplayer** 32 players ◆ **Link** www.apoxgame.com ◆ **ESRB** NR



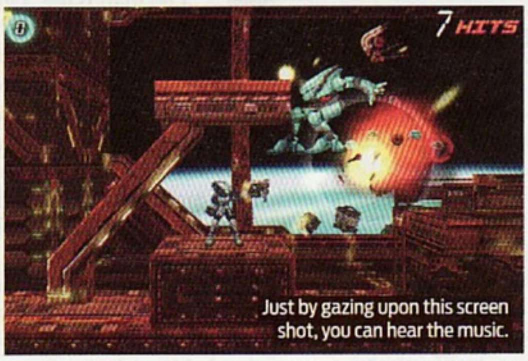
What would Zapp Branigan do?

KAPTAIN BRAWE: A BRAWE NEW WORLD exudes charm

Right out of the gate, *Kaptain Brawe* shows signs of comedy adventure greatness, in the mold of *The Curse of Monkey Island*. As the comically inept space traveler Kaptain Brawe, you point-and-click your way through clever puzzles of the quirky item-combination variety. The lush, hand-drawn backgrounds will bring you back to the '90s, and the music is pleasantly low-key. Absent voice acting is a disappointment, but the goofy writing still manages to generate laughs, and casual players will appreciate the gradual hint system. Despite hitting most of the right notes, it's so short that it's barely memorable. ■ ***Lucas Sullivan***

PC GAMER 70

◆ **Price** $20 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Link** http://bit.ly/g8XPXS ◆ **ESRB** NR



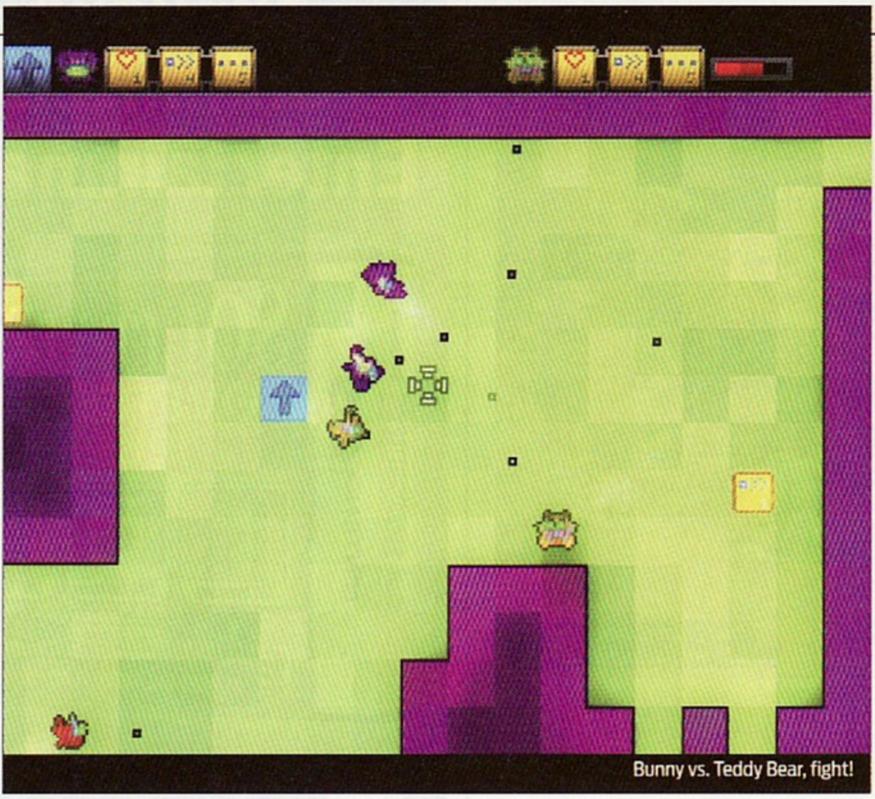
Just by gazing upon this screen shot, you can hear the music.

ARES: EXTINCTION AGENDA is a modern-day *Mega Man*

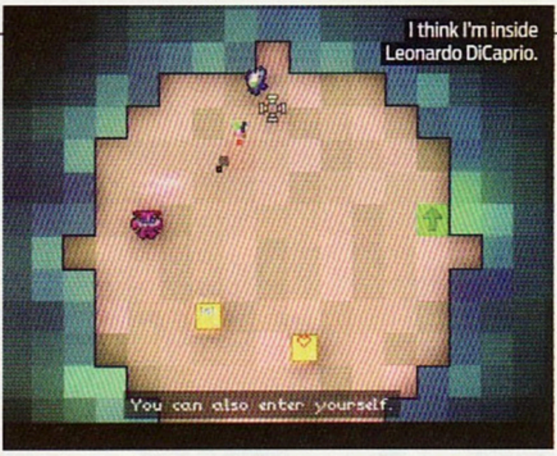
As I jump my ninja-fast robot from one brightly colored platform to the next, I stomp over the remains of my freshly blasted enemies. With its rockin' techno beats, *ARES* takes me back to the days of the classic NES *Mega Man* games. Though I finished this first episode in 90 minutes, every second was a blast. Then, when you beat the game, you can restart with the upgrades you've earned, such as the devastating high-explosive grenade, which lets you enter previously inaccessible areas. I'm definitely staying tuned for the next episode. ■ ***Anthony Valva***

PC GAMER 79

◆ **Price** $10 ◆ **Release** Out now **Link** http://ares.x10studio.com ◆ **ESRB** NR

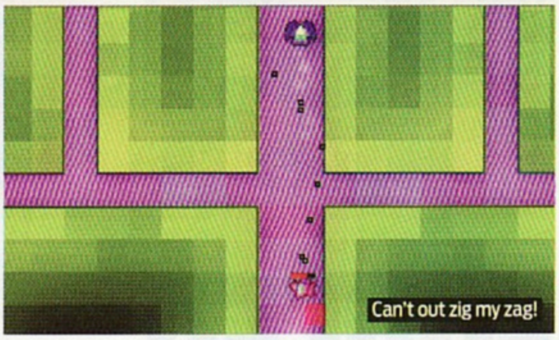


Bunny vs. Teddy Bear, fight!



I think I'm inside Leonardo DiCaprio.

You can also enter yourself.



Can't out zig my zag!

GOING DEEPER

INSIDE A STAR-FILLED SKY is the longest game ever made *by Robert Hathorne*

Need to know

What is it?
A procedurally-generated recursive arcade shooter that puts you inside you

Play it on:
1GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, integrated graphics

Influenced by
Spelunky, Borderlands

Alternatively
Everyday Shooter (84%)

Copy protection
None

Surrounded by tentacled, bullet-spitting blobs on a murderous rampage, I zig, blast and zag my embryonic squid through pixel-perforating mayhem. Just inches from the temporary safety of a warp zone, an arc of heat-seeking blocks catches my tail and sends me on a nosedive into oblivion. I'm not dead, though—I've become a miniature purple telephone-creature inside of my previous squid self. Like everything else in *Inside a Star-filled Sky*, death isn't an endpoint, but rather one of a nearly infinite set of possible beginnings and opportunities to alter myself and the randomly-generated, blocky world around me.

The heart of *ISFS* is a 2D shoot-'em-up, fused with the openness of *Minecraft* and churned through the wild mind of *Sleep is Death* creator Jason Rohrer. The result is frenetic action where the only goals are your own, and the random levels and creatures far exceed what you'd see in a lifetime of play. With enough determination, I can be whatever and wherever I want.

Inside job

Life as a purple telephone is similar to the life before it, and the ones that are sure to follow. I navigate with WASD and aim with the mouse, collect upgrade combinations such as spreader bullets and land mines, kill anything that moves and—most importantly—keep going. The game hasn't instructed me to do so, nor has it given victory conditions. I go because I want faster bullets and deader enemies. That's it.

When I successfully reach a warp zone, the camera pulls back to reveal the larger creature I was in, and now control. This new creature has all of the upgrades I collected (but couldn't use) as the creature within it. If I die, the camera zooms into myself, and I again become a creature roaming within.

Demanding that I establish my own goals gives me extraordinary freedom. For example, on a quest for long-range, rapid-fire land mines, I learn that I can not only progress through warp-zones, but can Shift-click any upgrade, enemy or even myself to enter it and alter its properties. A modest endeavor for better bullets ends with me completely lost somewhere beyond a moose-head creature inside an upgrade inside myself inside an enemy and, finally, beside myself at being once more, inside myself.

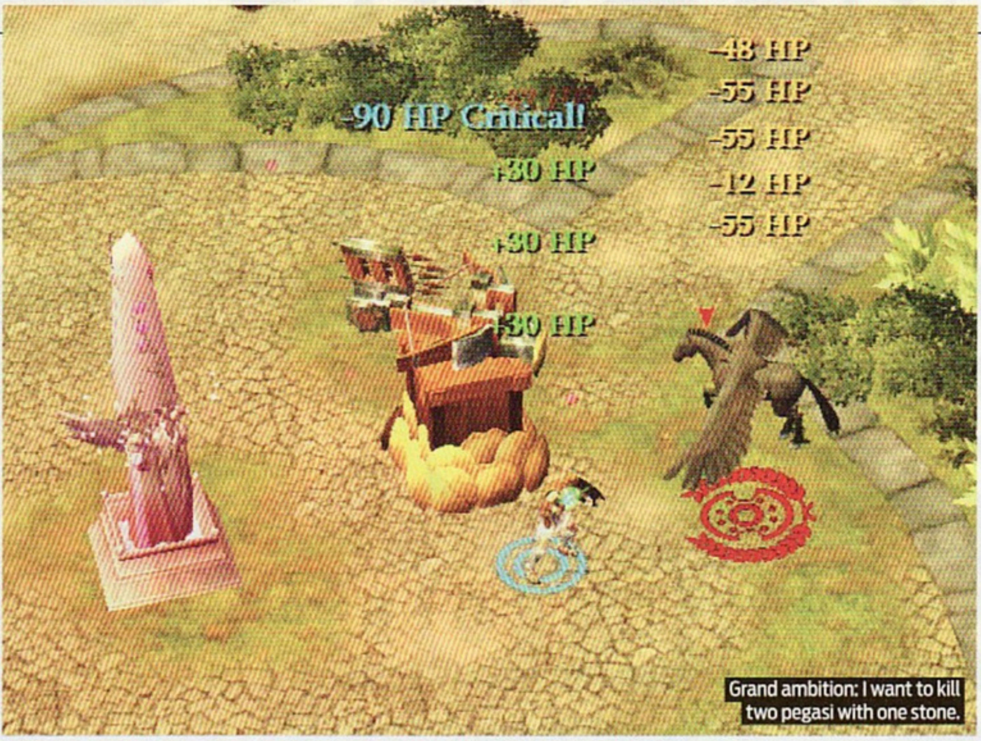
For some, that aimlessness is sure to be a sticking point. While you're given endless layers to navigate, roaming without a provided goal can lose its sense of purpose. Sometimes we need that, though—driving without a GPS can lead us down memorable detours. ■

VERDICT

Gauntlet and *Asteroids* meets *Inception*. *Inside a Star-filled Sky* is a single-concept game that's worth experiencing.

PC GAMER **78**

◆ **Price** $12 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Jason Rohrer ◆ **Developer** Jason Rohrer
◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.insideastarfilledsky.net ◆ **ESRB** N/R



Grand ambition: I want to kill two pegasi with one stone.

AGAINST ALL GODS

It's you and your magic stones against the power of Olympus in **MYTHEON** *by Jim H. Moreno*

It may look and feel like a typical action-RPG set ancient Greek and Egyptian mythology, but *Mytheon*'s combat soon reveals a surprisingly inventive approach that sets it apart from its peers.

In *Mytheon*'s story, I'm a Stonecaster, given power stones imbued with elemental magic (air, earth, fire, water), and sent to overthrow the ancient gods. My inventory is stocked with power stones that cast my many elemental-based spells, such as damage-over-time fire debuffs and swirling air attacks that do extra damage against flying creatures. I can also summon minions, such as aggro-pulling bodyguards and giant minotaurs, and command them to attack or defend real-time strategy-style.

The clever twist: only five power stones are available during combat, and are replaced randomly after use. It's a constantly changing and unpredictable kind of action that helps keep combat strategic, brutal, and fun whether I won or lost.

It does need more variety, though. Given that this is an online RPG, I expected to see far more than three classes available, but at least the Warcaster (fighter), Elementalist (mage) and Eidelon (cleric) are warmly familiar and easy to get the hang of. They could certainly use more character customization options, too—the selection of avatar face and hair choices is disappointingly slim.

Though the graphics are locked at an ancient 1280x1024 resolution, the central hub city's classical architecture, ancient Grecian underworld zones, flashy spell effects and the mythological beasts you fight are all rendered nicely, giving me the comfortable feeling of watching an old *Jason and the Argonauts* movie.

Enemy AI puts up a respectable battle, weilding roughly the same elemental spell and minion-summoning powers that players do. PvP is, of course, where I found the most tactical combat, but it became a bit boring due to a lack of variety in modes.

Mytheon makes its money by selling "*Mytheon* Coins" to buy high-powered spells and abilities, above and beyond what the stones allow. At 10 MCs for $2, it's not a bad deal when you need a specific power to win a troublesome boss battle, but with no way to earn MC in-game, payment feels obligatory.

Mytheon is just shy of being a really good venue for inexpensive adventuring. The combination of its random combat and its regular patching schedule will definitely inspire me to check in frequently. ■

PC GAMER **76**

◆ **Price** Free, with micro-transactions ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** UTV True Games ◆ **Developer** UTV True Games
◆ **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** www.mytheongame.com ◆ **ESRB** N/A

PC GAMER

How we review

Wherever possible, we finish every game before finalizing the review. We review each game on its own merits and match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The primary aim of the reviews section is to help you make buying decisions. As such, we'll review content of all types in addition to the latest big-name releases.

Our scoring system explained

0-30% Intolerable
A crime against gaming. Whether it's bugs or bad design, this should be shot on sight.

31-45% Weak
Serious flaws ruin any chance this game has of offering sustained fun.

46-60% Mediocre
A very ordinary game, quickly forgotten. Think twice, even if you find it cheap.

61-75% Fair
A decent effort that, but for a little more polish, coulda been a contender.

76-89% Good
Enjoyable, well-made and entertaining—just falling short of true greatness.

90%+ Editor's Choice
A glowing example within its genre of excellence in design and execution.

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

A game scoring 80% or more is eligible to receive the PC Gamer Editor's Choice award. The Editor's personal seal of approval means we think the recipient is a truly great example of its genre.

PC Gamer's 10 Latest and Greatest

Crysis 2 (89%)
May 2011

Total War: Shogun 2 (92%)
May 2011

Gary Grigsby's War in the East (90%)
May 2011

Test Drive Unlimited 2 (90%)
April 2011

DC Universe Online (88%)
April 2011

Dragon Age 2 (94%)
April 2011

WoW: Cataclysm (93%)
March 2011

Lock On: Flaming Cliffs 2 (90%)
March 2011

Super Meat Boy (90%)
March 2011

BFBC2: Vietnam (90%)
March 2011

DON'T MISS A SINGLE ISSUE

@GAMER

THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

IN STORE AT THE REGISTER OR AT
www.atgamermagazine.com/order

SAVE OVER $200 A YEAR WITH @GAMER COUPONS*

- Expert Reviews and Previews
- Get Amazing Deals on Games, Accessories, New Releases, and Pre-Releases
- 10 issues a year
- Save 67% off newsstand price

***Get at least $20 in Best Buy coupons in every issue**

$130 IN COUPONS
STARCRAFT II PG.76
SUPER GAME PC
@GAMER
THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY
METROID: OTHER M
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS
Kinect vs Move
Guitar Hero vs Rock Band 3

DOWNLOAD THE FREE DEMO

of the new interactive @GAMER app for iPad today!

Available through iTunes and Atgamermagazine.com/ipadapp

World of Warcraft
Official Magazine
World of Warcraft
Magazine
World of Warcraft
Magazine
LICENSED
BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT
PRODUCT

WORLD OF WARCRAFT THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

EVERY ISSUE FEATURES:

- Interviews
- Community
- Strategy
- Lore and More!
- Deluxe, high quality, collectible
- MASSIVE! 148 pages— NO ADS!
- Specially commissioned artwork available nowhere else

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

www.worldofwarcraftthemagazine.com

© 2010 Blizzard Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved. Warcraft, World of Warcraft and Blizzard Entertainment are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Blizzard Entertainment, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All other trademarks referenced herein are the properties of their respective owners. © 2010 Future US, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

EXTRA LIFE
GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMING

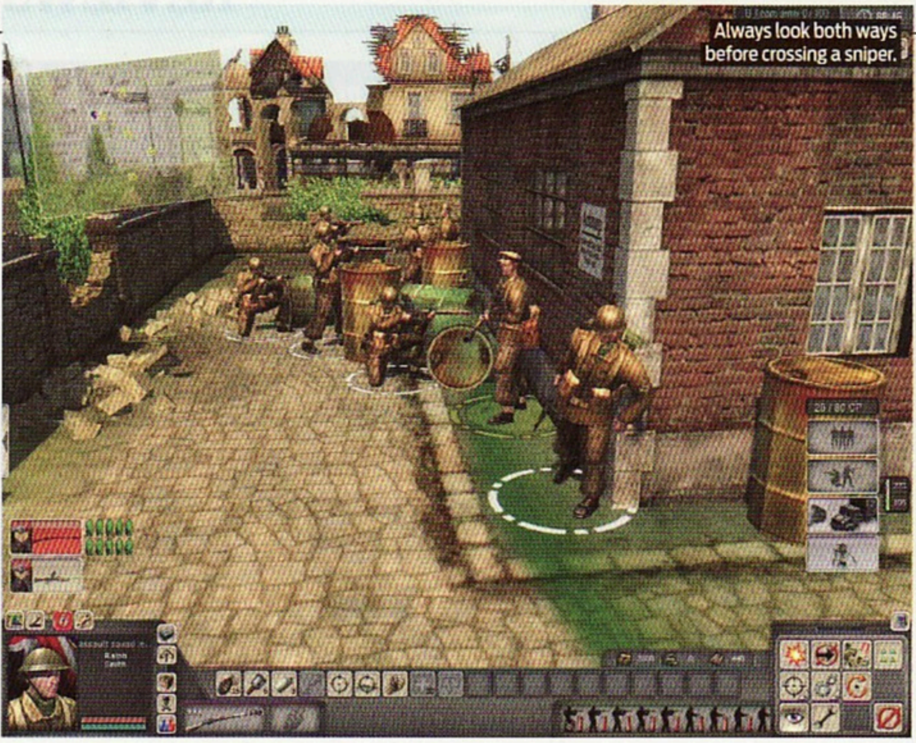
REINSTALL
CLASSICS OF PC GAMING REVISITED

s Flowers
Cindy's DONUTS
317

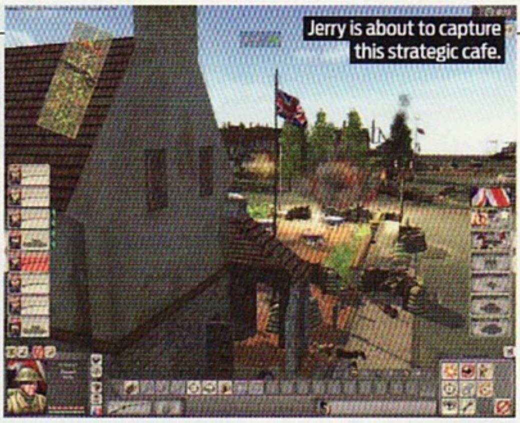
Even by Sierra standards, *Police Quest* wants you dead.

Police Quest

GET READY TO GO *IN PURSUIT OF THE DEATH ANGEL*—BUT ONLY AFTER COFFEE AND PAPERWORK ***by Richard Cobbett***



Always look both ways before crossing a sniper.



Jerry is about to capture this strategic cafe.

Welcome to the jungle, we've got fun 'n' Japanese troops.

MAN UP

MEN OF WAR: ASSAULT SQUAD fights the good online fight *by Rob Zacny*

Need to know

What is it?
A micromanagement-heavy real-time tactical game set in WWII

Play it on
Dual-core 3GHz CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce GTX 260/Radeon HD 4870

Influenced by
Myth, Battlefield 1942

Alternatively
Company of Heroes (96%)

Copy protection
Steam

A German King Tiger tank has crossed the river and is now rolling up our flank, its armor easily deflecting everything my Russian soldiers can throw at it, its guns multiplying casualties in its wake. My teammate and I face another do-or-die moment in *Men of War: Assault Squad*.

There's no single-player campaign in this real-time tactical WWII game, just mercilessly tough AI skirmishes and tense online action. This is the latter, and in this mode, Combat, there's a nuanced strategy to the unit deployment. Better units are worth more points when destroyed, so this Tiger is a vulnerability for the enemy, but my team's reluctance put all our eggs in big, heavily armed baskets has enabled the Tiger's rampage.

I race my only serious anti-armor unit, an SU-85 tank-destroyer, through heavy forest to intercept the Tiger. It carves a swath of splintered trees as its engines roar—the effects make the battlefield vivid, but are ruining my sneak attack.

"Careful with that SU," my teammate warns me. Like most people I've played with, he's very helpful. Perhaps the awful GameSpy interface, with its lack of game sorting, friend invites or in-game voice chat, teaches them patience. *MOWAS* succeeds in spite of this feature poverty due in large part to its community, most of whom offer help when I make mistakes.

Playing the terrain

Mistakes like failing to escort my tank-destroyer. A *panzerschreck* rocket blasts out of nowhere, narrowly missing, and German infantry charge out of the trees.

My teammate comes zipping to the rescue with a machine-gun carrier, mowing through the Germans. Unlike dense cities, where machine guns and sniper rifles reign supreme, or Pacific island maps where swamps and dense foliage mean that mortars and artillery carry the day, this forest map is very friendly to anti-personnel vehicles.

The infantry assault exposed my tank-hunter to the Tiger, and now it's a shootout. His first shots detonate in the trees; mine don't dent its front armor. Then, with a bang and clatter, my left tank track unspools. If he keeps moving, I won't be able to hit him again, and all will be lost.

In a last-ditch effort I take direct control of the SU. I open the tank's inventory and load one of my last armor-piercing shells, and hover my cursor over his treads. I score a solid hit, successfully immobilizing it, and our infantry overrun and blast the crippled Tiger with explosives. Its turret launches skyward on a column of flame as the match timer runs down, giving us the victory.

There's a friendly round of "GG's" in the post-game chat. My teammate asks, "Again?"

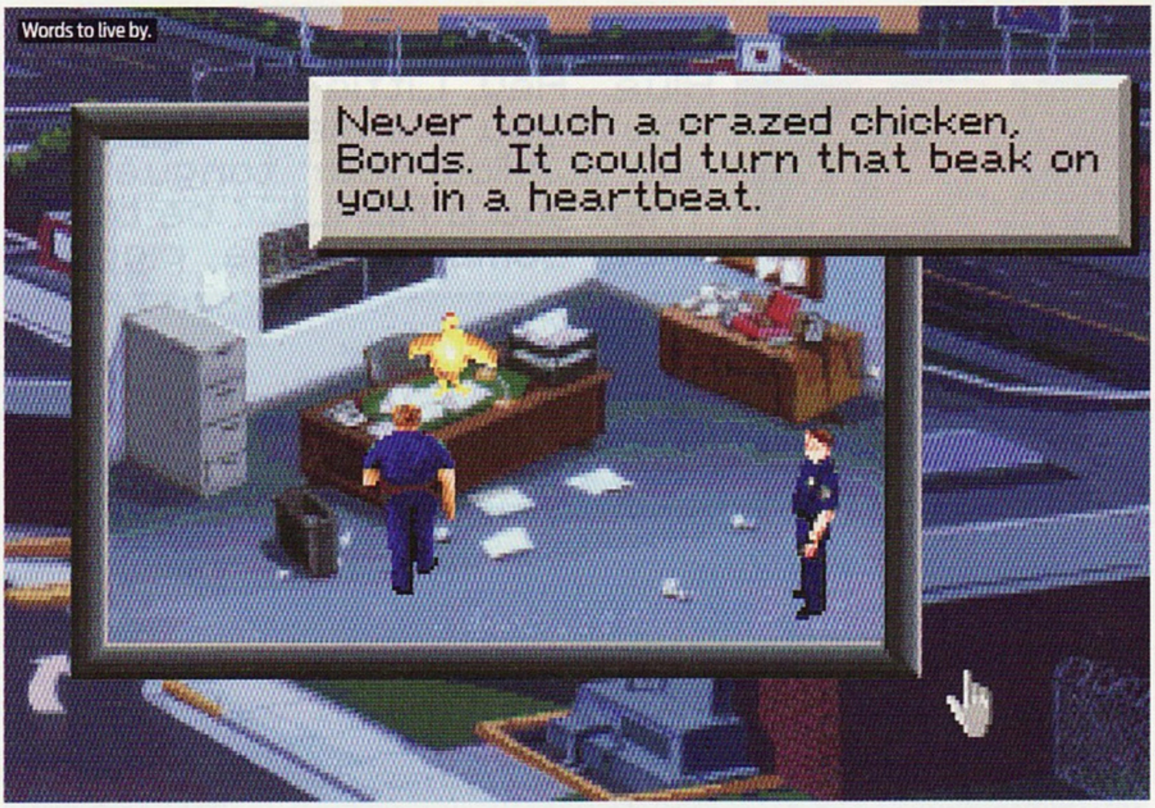
Absolutely. ■

◆ **Price** $35 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** 1C Company ◆ **Developer** Digitalmindsoft ◆ **Multiplayer** 16 players versus, 8 players co-op ◆ **Link** www.menofwargame.com/assault ◆ **ESRB** NR

VERDICT

Vivid and tactically demanding, *Assault Squad* is a brilliant multiplayer game that's even better with friends.

PC GAMER **85**



Words to live by.

Never touch a crazed chicken, Bonds. It could turn that beak on you in a heartbeat.

Maybe it's just me, but I never could take *Police Quest* very seriously. I know I probably should. It's certainly a serious game—an interactive police-procedural adventure written by a real cop, and supposedly used by others as a training tool. For me though, it was always something else—closer to the dreams that good cops probably have after eating too much cheese before going to bed. It's like a fevered nightmare of repressed paranoia, lessened only by a little guilty wish-fulfillment to round off a long day of being abused and unappreciated.

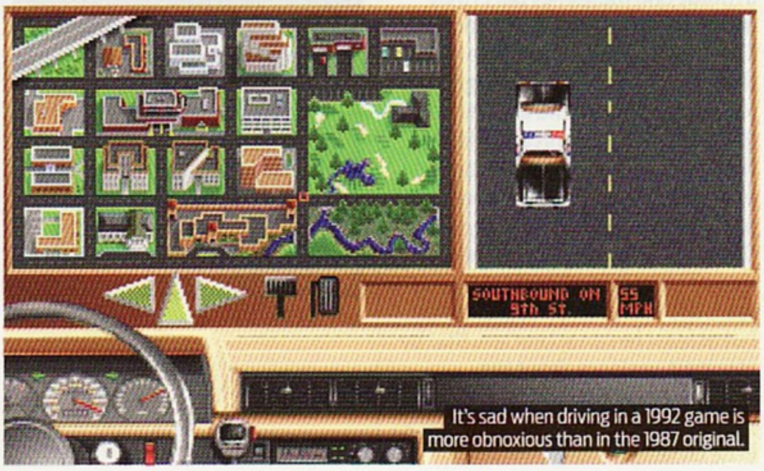
Police Quest's goal is to simulate the experiences that a real cop might have on a daily basis. So, like most dreams, it starts out rooted in reality. You're Sonny Bonds, a regular beat cop, going about his day in the decaying Lytton City (the bigger mystery plot shows up much later). You drive around until your radio tells you something's going on, then you drive over there and deal with it. You stop speeding motorists. You call in the appropriate authorities at an accident scene. You chat with a hottie who turns into a spitting hellcat if you don't let her out of a ticket (and gives you the police commissioner's wife's phone number if you do). You sort out trouble at a coffee house. In short, you do your job.

Badgered

Oh, and you die. A lot. This is where our sleeping cop's paranoia kicks in. Even by Sierra standards, *Police Quest* wants you dead. Run a red light? Game over. Don't call for backup? Bye-bye. Don't check your gun into a locker before going into jail? The perp will pull it from your belt and pop you. This is a game where you can single-handedly face down a bar full of bikers, only to get cold-cocked by an incorrectly-handcuffed drunk. In the original version, you don't simply have to check your car before you head off on patrol—you have to manually walk to all four sides and check them each in turn, otherwise you instantly blow a tire. The kicker? If you do the check, nothing is wrong. That's just cruel!

Both versions of *Police Quest* are brutal—the original, released in 1987, uses a text-parser interface, the 1992 remake uses icons. You can muddle through the icons, but the only way you were getting anywhere with the text version was to follow the manual's procedures down to the letter, literally.

Of course, that strict adherence to proper procedure actually makes the moments when *Police Quest* goes utterly insane all the funnier. For starters, while the story technically takes place over the course of a few



It's sad when driving in a 1992 game is more obnoxious than in the 1987 original.

READ ME

RELEASE DATE
1987 (original)
1992 (VGA)

PUBLISHER
Sierra Online

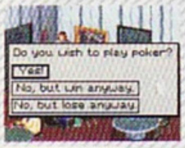
DEVELOPER
Sierra Online

GET IT
$9, Good Old Games (www.GOG.com)

VIDEO GUIDE
Let's Play *Police Quest* 1
http://bit.ly/gR2KvP

TRIVIA
Sonny and Sweet Cheeks do end up happily married by the third *Police Quest* game. Their relationship was later parodied in country and western form in *Leisure Suit Larry 6*, which featured lines like "I pray yer just unfaythful when ya don't come home 'til two / Perhaps ah oughta go back out and hit the streets like yew..." and "Is it so wrong, a workin' girl, who loves a man in blue? I hope I nevah make parole. From Cell Block Love with yew..." Listen to it at http://bit.ly/ifFRLZ.

FAVORITE MOMENT
Booty call!



Do you wish to play poker?

FAVORITE PUZZLE
Play to...what?

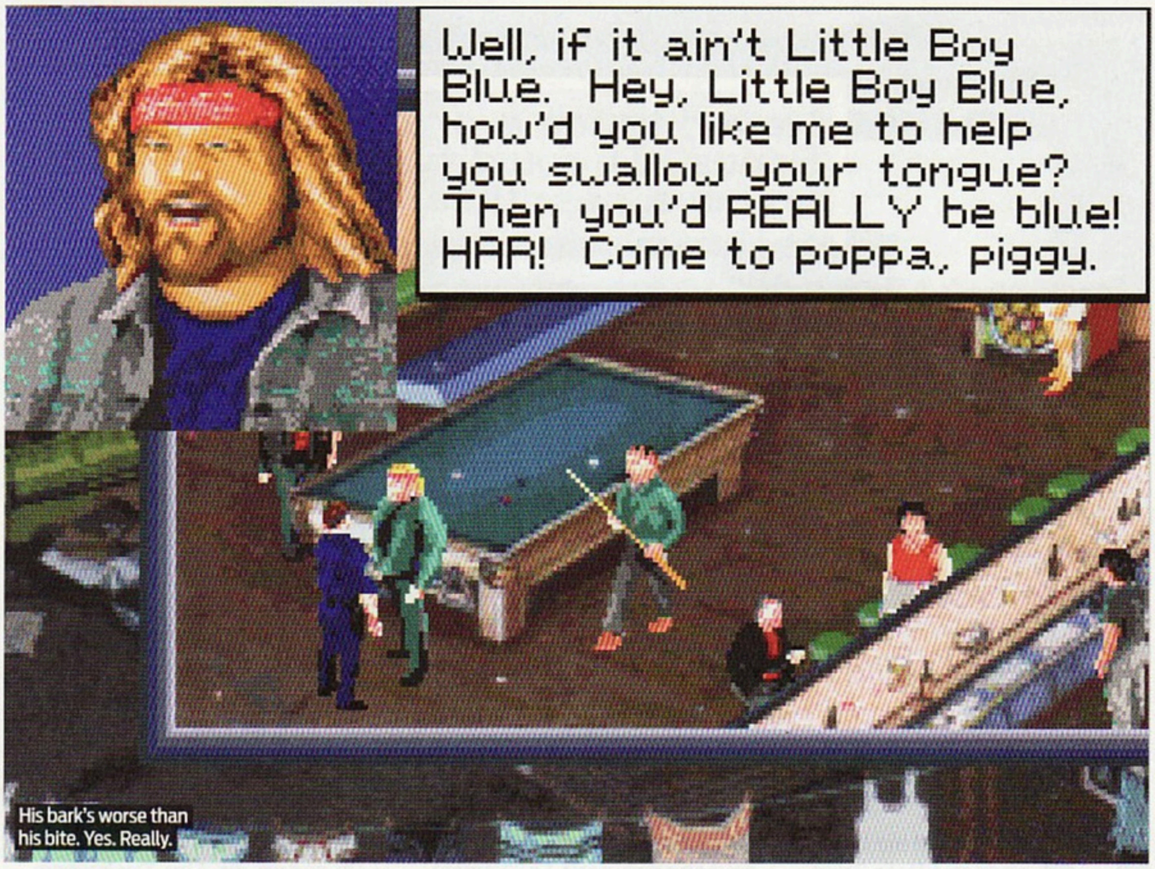
YOUR PC IN 1992
Operating System: DOS
Processor: Intel 80386
RAM: 1MB
Videocard:
VGA (640x480)
Monitor Size: 15"

OTHER 1992 GAMES WE ♥

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
Logan: This was LucasArts at the top of its game: great puzzles, a terrific globetrotting story, and a comely mentalist named Sophia made this a much more entertaining addition to the oeuvre than that *Crystal Skull* crap.

DUNE II
Dan: It wasn't the first RTS, but it was the first to include modern elements like a world map, resource gathering, and tech trees. I'd love to see someone bring this license back (again)—the Spice must flow!

THE LOST VIKINGS
Evan: A *Lemmings*-like, Blizzard-made puzzle-platformer that called on careful thinking to prevent your tiny men from losing their beards and lives. It also had the best sequel title ever: *Norse by Norsewest: Return of the Lost Vikings*.



Well, if it ain't Little Boy Blue. Hey, Little Boy Blue, how'd you like me to help you swallow your tongue? Then you'd REALLY be blue! HAR! Come to poppa, piggy.

His bark's worse than his bite. Yes. Really.

days, in practice you never go home or off-duty for more than five minutes, making the whole adventure seem like some bizarre, mirror-universe season of *24* where Jack Bauer is a stickler for due process. Even better: in the text-driven version, you can type "remove uniform," and Sonny will actually get his little nightstick out in the middle of a crime scene, dying of shame. Yikes.

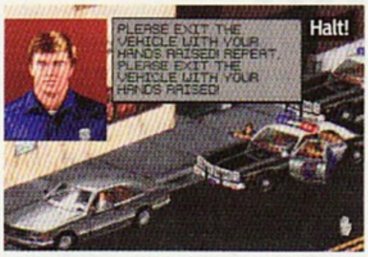
With a heart of gold

Finally, there's the game's love interest. Oh boy. Now, I'm not saying a cop and a hooker shouldn't fall for each other. I'm just saying that I can't not giggle at a by-the-book cop ending up with a callgirl (who happens to be your former high school sweetheart) named Sweet Cheeks. The story only gets sillier from that point too, as you use her prostitute connections to track down the titular Death Angel (a drug dealer called Jessie Bains—Sonny's nemesis in the sequel, but largely irrelevant until the very end of this story) by going undercover and beating his friends at poker.

Alternatively, you can screw up, miss the big game due to sleeping with Sweet Cheeks instead, and lose your career when your boss calls and hears her screaming out in pleasure. Being the single best game-over condition in Sierra history doesn't make that feel any less out of place in a "serious" police game!

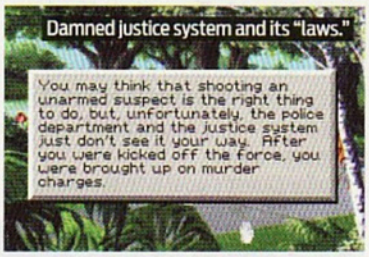
The clash between its by-the-book attitude and the gamey parts makes it charming.

But *Police Quest* isn't serious—not really. It pretends to be, but it's the clash between its by-the-book attitude and the gamey parts that makes it so charming, and it knows it. The sequels wasted little time upping the stakes, with Sonny moving to the Homicide Department, and a third game involving an evil cult. Still, this first game was always my favorite, especially the more down-to-earth parts that simply try to convey the flavor of being on patrol. A real cop may not find *Police Quest* to be a realistic simulation of his profession, but at least he can appreciate that by playing it, we learn about the hookers, bar fights, and rigid rules he must abide by in order to keep us all a little bit safer. ■



PLEASE EXIT THE VEHICLE WITH YOUR HANDS RAISED! REPEAT, PLEASE EXIT THE VEHICLE WITH YOUR HANDS RAISED!

Halt!



Damned justice system and its "laws."

You may think that shooting an unarmed suspect is the right thing to do, but, unfortunately, the police department and the justice system just don't see it your way. After you were kicked off the force, you were brought up on murder charges.

It isn't a party until the French maid walks in with balloons.

I'm so sorry, Officer. I just didn't see that stop sign. I'm so embarrassed. I promise I'll never do it again. Please don't give me a ticket.

The world's greatest gadget magazine, wherever and whenever you want.

TEN REASONS TO BUY...
The Panasonic Lumix GF2
Scroll down for tech talk
BUGATTI KILLER
WWW.T3.COM
T3
WORLD'S FIRST 3D PHONE EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON
LIVE SMARTER ISSUE
365 APPS TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFE
PLUS THE BEST NEW PHONES IN THE WORLD
GAME ON!
Sony NGP & PSP phone
Nintendo 3DS rated
TAKE A FLYER
HTC's first tablet lands
CAN ANYTHING STOP IT?
iPAD 2
The battle for tablet supremacy
HOW TO CONQUER THE CLOUD
F1 NEW SEASON KIT

Available in print, online, on mobile and iPad

T3

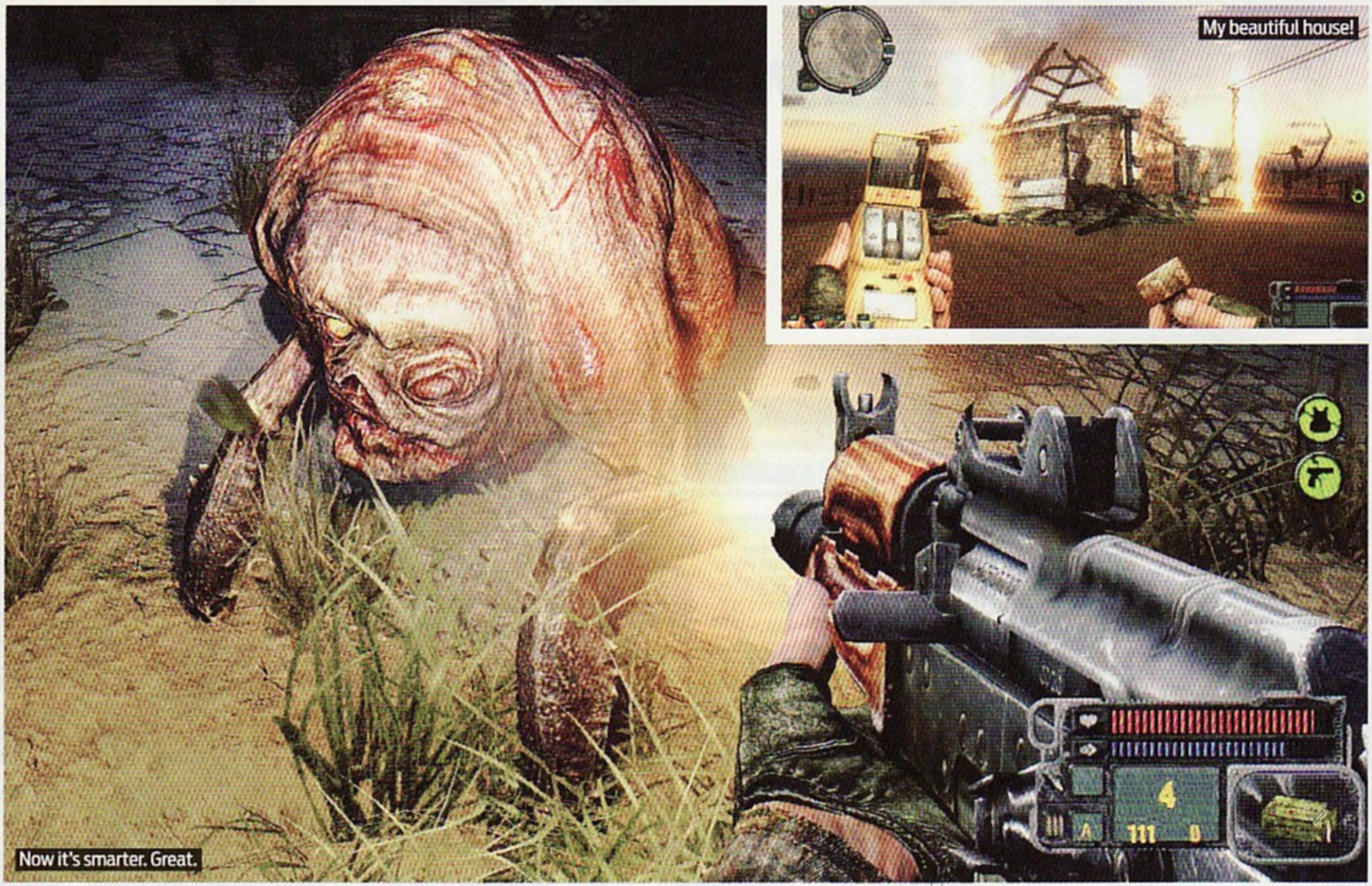
www.t3.com

The latest issue of T3 magazine is available now at iTunes, Zinio or at all good newsagents.

zinio™

Available on the App Store

DOWNLOADS FREE GAMES STUFF FROM THE WEB



My beautiful house!

Now it's smarter. Great.

1 Smarter horrors

MOD UPGRADE YOUR NIGHTMARES WITH **STALKER: RELOADED**

This is something that happens to almost every great game eventually: a huge mod that revamps textures, raises graphical quality, improves the AI, and makes hundreds of little tweaks to items, weapons, creatures, other Stalkers, and the way the world itself works.

Without a single modification, *STALKER: Call of Pripyat* is an enthralling adventure. It places you into a haunted, believable Chernobyl exclusion zone. *Reloaded* makes it worse—in a good way.

The Zone finally feels modern: visual technology has caught up with our bad dreams. The sun is blindingly beautiful, spilling shafts of light through the gaps in trees and abandoned Soviet dredgers. Insects buzz in the long, waving grass. Bloodsucking Snorks frolick in the gore-drenched caves. Emissions (brain-bursting psionic storms) are now an order of magnitude more pants-threateningly frightening.

You have to start a new game to play, but it's just as well: the changes to the combat take getting used to. Weapons are punchier—*STALKER* was always a game where headshots were deadlier, but now it's the most efficient way to kill.

That doesn't mean that human enemies die easily. Stalkers are smarter at picking weapons depending on the range they're fighting at. They're also a little more clever with grenades, using cover and even running away. After my first battle, I noticed that I was nearly dead just from bleeding. Finally, a reason to dip into that enormous stock of bandages you collect.

AI Stalkers and bandits are also more capable scavengers, managing their own inventories when looting corpses, leaving unwanted crap instead of arbitrarily taking as many sausages and AK-47s as they can, and even dumping their own stuff in favor of choice pieces of gear.

It's a big download, but there's a lot here. Go and rediscover *Pripyat*. Bring bandages. **EL**

SIZE 1.1 GB **LINK** http://bit.ly/guMdAQ

EVAN SAYS...
That's right, AI bandits: leave those sausages where they are. More for me!

2 WEBGAMES

MONEY MATTERS

FOUR GAMES WHERE YOU STRUGGLE TO MAKE A DIME

Here are four free games about business, from the dizzy heights of the stock market to the harrowing realities of homelessness. JM

American Dream
Buy and sell shares in people like Bill Cosby and Madonna, in this scary, satirical game. Make a million! Succeed! Buy! Sell! *Do not fail*. http://bit.ly/f94bui

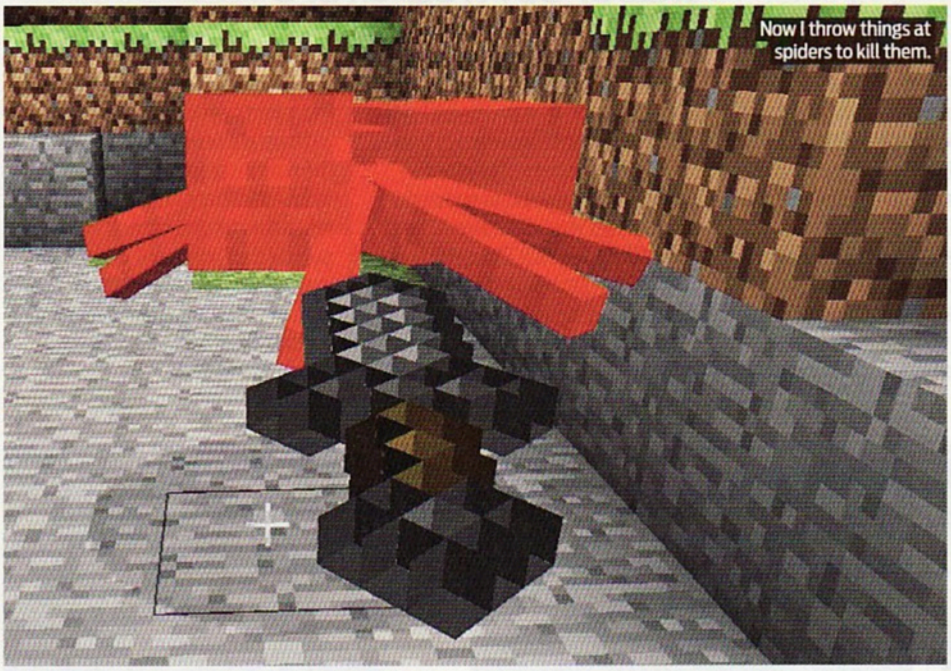
Oiligarchy
No list of money games would be complete without this classic about being a oil baron doing shady things to keep up the price per barrel. http://bit.ly/N1VJ

Spent
An amusingly depressing game that asks you to make tough choices after you lose your job, home, and all but your last $1,000. www.playspent.org

MMORPG Tycoon
You've inherited an unpopular MMO, and must put it right. I called mine *Man Battle Online*. http://bit.ly/9HTeQt

3 Crazy craftables

MOD NEW WEAPONS AND TOOLS TO CREATE IN **MINECRAFT**



Now I throw things at spiders to kill them.

Thank the blocky heavens! You finally have a way to safely shear sheep in *Minecraft*. Modder GreyAcumen has worked in a fully functional boomerang (that ricochets and returns to the player) along with heaps of other combat items and tools in his *Extended 2x2 Crafting Grid*.

If this shopping list doesn't make you want to slay skeletons and go dungeoning, I'll eat my *Team Fortress 2* hat. There's a sling for tossing rocks, throwable daggers, grenades, powder-bombs, a bow drill for starting fires, a portable grill, miniature tools, and gosh-darn *fire arrows*. The mod will also soon add a "hypnowatch," which turns monsters into temporary friends.

To install it, grab the mod file from the link below and follow the instructions in this handily up-to-date forum thread: http://bit.ly/mcmodin. Don't worry, it's not tough—you'll be throwing things in no time. **JA**

SIZE 200KB **LINK** http://bit.ly/hZWn5Y

4 E-SPORTS

MIRROR MIRROR

WATCH THE SILLIEST *STARCRAFT II* LADDER MATCH EVER

In *StarCraft II*, when two players pick the same race, it's called a mirror match. In this one, TheLittleOne and ZeeRax both pick Protoss on Shakuras Plateau.

Usually, both players will do some heavy scouting and try to build a force totally different from that of their opponent. In fact, that's how *every* match should go. This time, though, these high-level pro players happened to pursue identical routes.

After expanding aggressively, the players clash at six minutes in. They both build giant Phoenix fleets—flying units that can't attack buildings but can levitate most ground units.

They're neck-and-neck the whole way, using almost identical tactics. A must-watch mirror match. **JM**

They're neck-and-neck the whole way, using almost identical tactics.

SIZE Video **LINK** http://bit.ly/fsT4nO

Protoss mosh pit!

MACHINIMA

In ***Heavy Birthday***, *TF2*'s cuddliest mercenary gets a new toy

» You may not play him very often, but Heavy has a winning personality. It's his birthday, and he rushes downstairs to see what the rest of the team got him. This film comes in two parts, each lovingly animated by Dasmatze. **JA**
http://bit.ly/gY4HRz

Press Alt+F4

1 The Sniper peruses his bookshelf, browsing past "---" by Gordon Freeman and "How to Outsmart a Bullet" by Saxton Hale, and flips open "Heavy Birthday." It's a new day at RED's secret base.

Chest hair

2 Saxton Hale arrives and presents Heavy with a package, then leaves to fight a white shark. After complaining that the box is tiny, Heavy opens it to find *Garry's Mod*'s toybox.

Move that gear

3 After pulling bombs, giant darts and cardboard cutouts from his toybox, Heavy produces a machine that remotely sends Engineer into a dancing fit. No joint is left in its socket.

HEAVY WEAPONS BUY

Oh, crate

4 The Heavy finds a crate, and heads to the *TF2* store to buy a key to open it. When Demoman accidentally sparks a war, Heavy steals a key and escapes in a shopping cart.

Master the dark art of loadouts

GET STARTED

DIFFICULTY Easy
TIME Ongoing

VITAL LINKS

Great YouTube map walkthroughs: ***http://bit.ly/i0lWmm***

Framerate and lag tips: ***http://snipurl.com/1xej9j***

Black Ops wiki: ***http://bit.ly/f092Ch***

Murder mannequins, get the Rolling Stones: ***http://bit.ly/eWPLMZ***

WILL PORTER'S GUIDE TO **CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS** MULTIPLAYER

Its appearance on the PC might have been as graceful as a nosedive into concrete, but the game the cool kids insist on calling "*BLOPS*" still holds a certain allure.

The basics of *CoD* multiplayer are clear: never let yourself get too comfortable playing the same game modes and carrying the same old equipment every time. But which guns should you use, and where?

The way to understand how your butt is being handed to you is to adopt for yourself the loadouts your killers use, and to learn the tricks of your equipment's murderous trade.

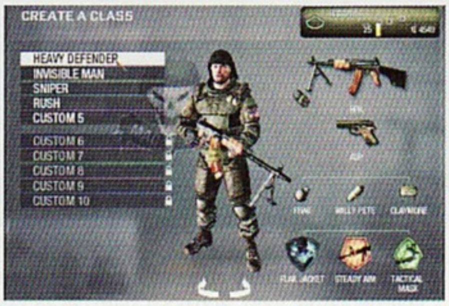
Utilizing a variety of loadouts—with different weapons and perks—also blesses you with more XP and *Call of Duty* Points (CP), as the first few challenges relating to each weapon are quick and easy to complete and carry a healthy payoff. It'll also help you tick off the shopping list of requirements for advancement to better versions of the game's perks.

There are only a few months until the next installment, but if we all follow the strategies below we can reach the maximum rank five times over by that point—when we'll all inevitably start all over again. Then we'll repeat the pattern every year for the rest of our lives. Forever. Hooray for *BLOPS*!

Monkey Brains
17

1 The art of gear

The best custom loadouts rely on synergy: many perks and weapons are natural fits. The readiness of an SMG suits the Marathon perk, and those corners you'll sprint 'round will ensure that Steady Aim's improvement to firing from the hip comes in handy. Likewise, a sniper rifle is happiest when accompanied by Ninja (invisible to heartbeat sensors), Ghost (invisible to radar), and Claymore (a proximity mine).

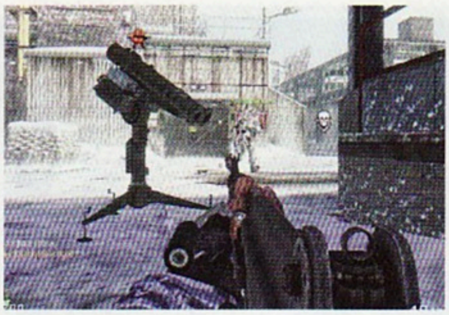


2 Heavy at the back

Match your loadout to your style. If you're playing defensively, take the Flak Jacket and Tactical Mask Pro perks. Grenades will be partly absorbed by the Flak Jacket, and the upgraded Tactical Mask ensures you won't be stunned. Enemies will rarely realize you're protected, so you can surprise them with a few bullets to the cranium when they rush in. Hardened (flinch less), a Jammer (block radar) and a trusty FAL assault rifle all help.

3 Get down!

It's instinct to keep moving toward a target once you have them in your sights, or sometimes to back away. Ultimately, both ploys are futile: instead, you want to shrink the person-shaped silhouette that your enemy sees as quickly as possible. The best way to do this, usually, is diving prone like a coward. Getting flat fast will help you dodge bullets; sauntering forward or furiously backpedaling won't.



4 Flyswatter

Never doubt the power of the surface-to-air missile. SAMs can prove decisive in objective game modes—don't pass them up on the basis that they can only hit air targets. Resist the temptation to place a missile turret as soon as you collect it (leaving it open to enemy attack)—hold onto it. Whipping out a SAM late in the game to take on a chopper takes the power back from the top-tier players, and makes you a hero.

5 LMG Appreciation Club

Most offensive players will default to an assault rifle, which is why intelligent use of the light machine gun can pull the bloodied rug from beneath the crippled limbs of many opponents. Not only are they generally deadlier, but the sustained fire of an LMG will surprise foes—doubly so when combined with extended or dual clips. The Sleight of Hand perk is needed to shorten the LMG's extended reload, however.

6 Vault the furniture

Experimentation will reward you with many more paths through levels than are immediately obvious. In turn, you'll find perches where novice players won't think to look. Vault up to the framework on Summit from the banks of computers, and you'll get access to a dual-layer radio mast outside. Many of the windows and ledges on WMD, meanwhile, can be jumped up and through. Boot up Combat Training to make exploration easier.

Unleash Your PC's potential with MAXIMUMPC

MAXIMUM PC GIVES YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO JOIN THE POWER-USER ELITE:

+ **PRODUCT REVIEWS!**
Hard-hitting reviews of the hottest new technology

+ **TIPS & TRICKS!**
Killer how-tos to help you supercharge your PC

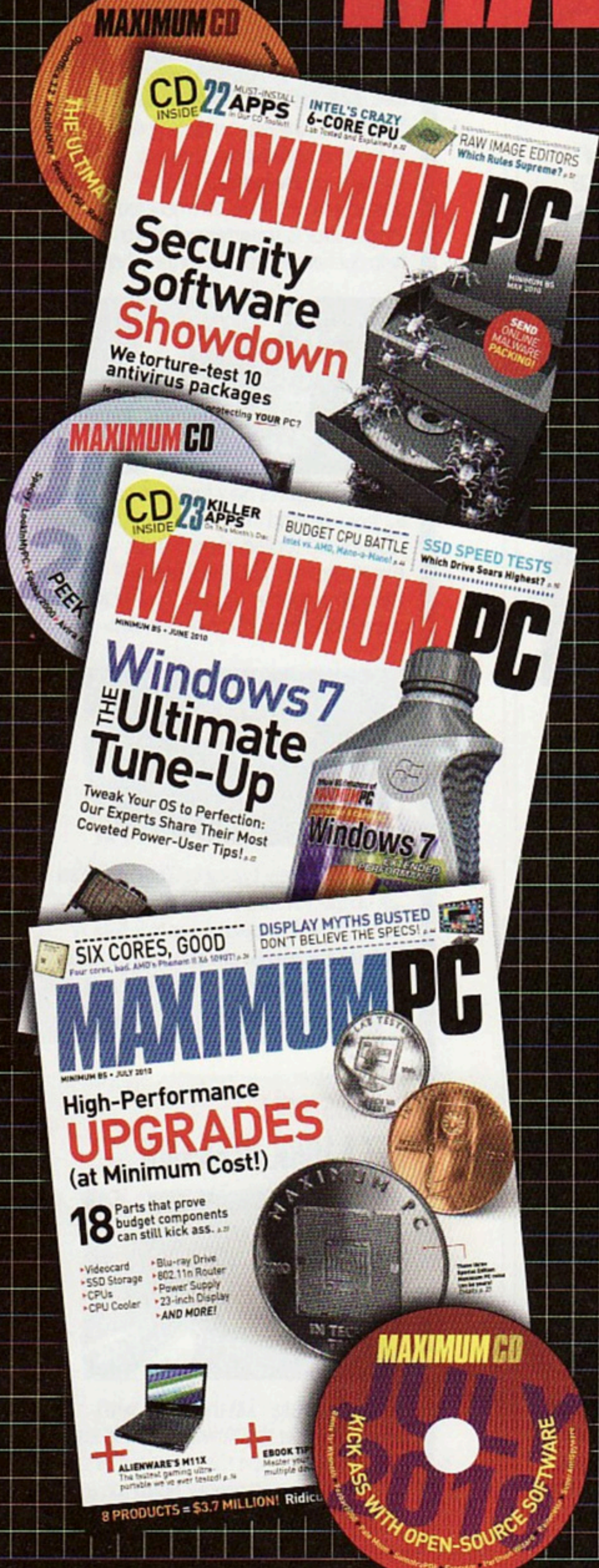
+ **DEEP-DIVE TECHSPLANATIONS!**
In-depth tech briefs on new hardware, software, and how it all works

+ **MONTHLY CD!**
Loaded with demos of new applications, utilities, and games

Subscribe Now and get 12 issues and 12 CDs for only $24.95!

That's 77% off the newsstand price!

SUBSCRIBE NOW at www.maximumpc.com/replynow


MAXIMUM CD
CD INSIDE 22 MUST-INSTALL APPS
INTEL'S CRAZY 6-CORE CPU
RAW IMAGE EDITORS Which Rules Supreme?
MAXIMUMPC
Security Software Showdown
We torture-test 10 antivirus packages
SEND ONLINE MALWARE PACKING!
CD INSIDE 23 KILLER APPS
BUDGET CPU BATTLE
SSD SPEED TESTS Which Drive Soars Highest?
Windows 7 THE Ultimate Tune-Up
Tweak Your OS to Perfection: Our Experts Share Their Most Coveted Power-User Tips!
SIX CORES, GOOD
DISPLAY MYTHS BUSTED DON'T BELIEVE THE SPECS!
High-Performance UPGRADES (at Minimum Cost!)
18 Parts that prove budget components can still kick ass.
ALIENWARE'S M11X
EBOOK TIPS
8 PRODUCTS = $3.7 MILLION!
KICK ASS WITH OPEN-SOURCE SOFTWARE

The Hard Stuff

GET THE PC YOUR GAMES DESERVE

TESTED

ZR30w

HP

One benefit to higher res: you'll be able to spot perfectly-camouflaged planes like this one.

Thanks to smaller and inexpensive multi-screen setups—30-inch monitors are something of a rarity. But that doesn't make them any less awesome. There's just nothing like having your *entire* field of vision enveloped by a single, behemoth monitor, such as HP's ZR30w. Its native resolution of 2560x1600 makes HDTVs and their 1920x1080 resolutions seem wimpy. The ZR30w's colors are bright and crisp, representing games and HD movies with maximum fidelity. Booting bandits off cliffs in *Bulletstorm* was a visual treat—I was floored by how vibrant and sharp the environments and characters looked. Even the blacks are strong and deep, which is an area where LCDs sometimes struggle (the design of an LCD requires all of its pixels to be lit at all times, which can cause washed-out darker colors). Streaking was minimal in breakneck games like *Split/Second* and *DiRT 2* with the ZR30w's 7-millisecond response time. But beware: you'll need a killer videocard—such as Nvidia's GTX 580—to get playable frame rates in the likes of *Crysis 2* and *Dragon Age 2* at the ZR30w's native res.

Sadly, there are some irritable design issues. For one, height adjustment is clumsy. You have to reach around the panel (no easy task) and push a minuscule button behind the base. If you forget to hold the top of the monitor while doing so, the screen shoots up like a rocket, wobbling the stand. (Screen tilt and side-to-side adjustments are smooth and easy, though.) Glare is a bother as well; I had to close the curtains even on rainy days to avoid blinding reflections from nearby windows. One of the most annoying omissions is a lack of an on-screen display (OSD). You can tweak the brightness with two buttons on the bezel—that's it. Come on, HP: that's lazy. And where are all the connector options? All you get are a single DVI-D and DisplayPort (located under the bezel, and maddening to access). The three extra USB ports are OK, but for $1,300, I expect a lot more. Still, this LCD's picture quality is astounding. If you can deal with some minor missteps, the ZR30w should be a prime contender for your desktop space. ■ ***Chris Comiskey***

$1,300, www.hp.com ◆ Category: Dream

SPECS ◆ **Screen Size** 30-inch ◆ **Resolution** 2560x1600 ◆ **Display Connectors** DisplayPort, DVI-D ◆ **Extra Connectors** USB 2.0 **Warranty** Three years parts and labor, on-site service ◆ **Dimensions** Width: 27.3", Depth: 11", Height: 23.3" ◆ **Weight** 28.6 lbs.

VERDICT

Enormous screen, heavenly 2560x1600 resolution, and wonderful color, but no OSD, heavy glare, and limited display connectors drag the value down.

PC GAMER 83

TESTED

Headset Roundup

Need a new headset? We've got you covered! ***by Chris Comiskey and Anthony Valva***

Chimera

Razer

On first glance, the Chimera's gloss and flat-black coloring is absolutely gorgeous, but this beauty is tarnished by some quirky design choices. For one, there's no USB connection. Instead, there's a docking station that resembles an upside-down "T" that's powered by an A/C outlet plug. You also have to use RCA cables to connect the docking station to your soundcard or motherboard. If neither of those have RCA inputs—and they probably don't—you'll have to search for a 3.5mm to RCA adapter cable that may or may not have come with your mobo or soundcard, or head to your local electronics store and buy one (they're just a couple bucks). You then rest the headset on top of the docking station to recharge the Chimera's two included, but tough to install AAA batteries.

Still—once it's functional—the Chimera sounds wonderful. It's a 2.1 headest, but the bass is punchy, and sword swipes and gunshots seem to come from all directions, despite the lack of any virtual surround software. The mic quality is average, but fine for gaming and Skype. I managed to squeeze out 10 hours of use on a charge, and I successfully walked up three flights of stairs before the 2.4GHz wireless signal began to hiccup. That's respectable, but for 130 bucks, there are better wireless headsets out there (such as the Logitech F540s) that don't require as much setup frustration. **CC**

PC GAMER
75

$130 ◆ www.razerzone.com ◆ Category: Dream

Tt eSPORTS Shock

Thermaltake

PC GAMER
EDITOR'S CHOICE
★★★★★

Getting a headset that rivals your 2.1 external speakers' sound is tough to do without dropping $200 (or more). And yet, the Tt eSPORTS Shock manages to do just that, and at a very reasonable $80. Each sound that flows into your ears is powerful, smooth, and snappy—whether it's a fireball detonating in *Dragon Age 2*, a Geisha's soft advice in *Total War: Shogun 2*, or the background music hammering away in *Mass Effect 2*'s Afterlife club. I never detected any audio glitches or muddied sound, even with the volume jammed to ear-bleed levels.

The magic doesn't stop there: the plush, soft ear cups fold up into themselves for easy and compact storage (via a strong metal hinge on each), and the plastic that covers them is bendable and rugged. The white coloring peppered with dashes of black and red looks fantastic, and the mic and sound cables are long enough to connect to a PC over six feet away. These headsets are helium-light as they rest on your noggin, and the microphone is surprisingly clear for in-game chat (but not quite to studio-recording quality). There aren't many extras though—you won't find THX/DTS support or 5.1 virtual surround software, for example, but that's fairly common for the sub-$100 realm. Considering that some other headsets cost three times as much and *still* don't sound as good, I can't recommend these enough. **CC**

PC GAMER
94

$80 ◆ www.thermaltakeusa.com ◆ Category: Mid

Nox Scout

This Scout is a Spy, hiding some powerful headsets in a pair of earbuds

Hate bulky headsets? Nox Scouts to the rescue! These earbuds are built with a cord that's flattened into a linguine-like shape. This is meant to prevent twisted wires and crimped cables, and it works well. The sensitivity of the on-wire mic left me wanting though—you need to hold the cable and speak directly into it, otherwise the mic picks up external chatter. The speakers sound great for earbuds—despite the bass being a little flat. Overall though, they're sturdy, you can fit them in your wallet, and they're super for gaming and music. Not bad for 80 bucks. **AV**

PC GAMER **83**

$80 ◆ www.nox-audio.com ◆ Category: Dream

Carbon

Psyko Audio Labs

This headset is absolutely massive. I'm talking Goliath-massive. After just two hours of using it, my neck ached as if I was wearing a military-grade Kevlar helmet. This is because the Psyko Carbon is constructed off a hard-molded, reinforced plastic frame (and consequently, it can't be folded up to save space). It's got some fabulous extras though, including a cloth-braided cable that doesn't get tangled on your desk, an external mix-amp with a bass and volume dial, and LED lights on the mix-amp that show which of the headset's speakers are currently being used. You can even pop open the sides of the ear cups via their hinged plastic covers to hear what's going on in the real world (but closing them is like hearing a door slam inside your skull). While the mic doesn't sound incredible, it's detachable, which is nice.

However, the Carbon sounds better than any headset I've ever tested. The audio is routed down from the top of the headband, and the speakers are positioned at different angles and locations inside the ear cups (as opposed to traditional headset speakers that all face your ears). The design is perfect. Echoes and thunderstorms surround you from all directions, shouts and groans from bad guys move around your head as you juke and weave through cover, while the sounds of your own gunshots and melee attacks are planted firmly in the center. The Carbon costs a fortune, but if you've got the money—and a strong neck—it's worth every nickel. **CC**

PC GAMER **87**

$200 ◆ www.psykoaudio.com ◆ Category: Dream

StarCraft II Banshee

Razer

The Banshee aims to showcase your skills in *StarCraft II*, but it miss the bull's-eye completely. The speakers and ear cups are protected in heavy, thick plastic, but the headband is unnecessarily wide, and the sides don't collapse inward or fold up, so it's awkward to carry around. The volume rockers of both the microphone and speakers are located on the back of the headset, making them awkward to reach. The lights along the bottom, sides, and edges change color to represent your actions per minute (APM), but they only work in *StarCraft II*. (Blue indicates normal APM, and scales from yellow to red as your APM increases.) You can change the colors through Razer's drivers, but I turned them off completely because they caused an annoying reflection in my monitor. To be clear here: the main distinguishing feature of the headset actually *detracted* from my concentration in *StarCraft II*.

Fortunately, the 2.1 surround sound is decent. Bass has *oomph* and the optional drivers from Razer's website provide an equalizer for audio tweaking. The Banshee also works well for music. The mic crackles randomly though, and it also picks up a ton of noise if you're in a loud area like a LAN party. Even if you're a voracious *StarCraft II* player, there's just not enough here to justify $120—not when better, less gawky headsets exist elsewhere. **AV**

PC GAMER **60**

$119 ◆ www2.razerzone.com ◆ Category: Dream

TESTED

StarCraft II Marauder

Razer

The Marauder isn't perfect, but at least it never says "KABOOM, baby!"

The Marauder's like a pair of Air Jordans—they look fantastic, but they're expensive, and buying them won't improve your skills at the game you know and love.

As part of Razer's line of *StarCraft II* gear, the Marauder's main feature is nifty dynamic backlighting that gauges your APM (actions-per-minute), exclusively in *SC2*; in other games, it simply glows a static color. And, annoyingly, this smallish keyboard requires *two* USB ports to make the lights work. Depending on how many actions you're spamming, the Marauder shines from a Protoss blue (when you're almost comatose) all the way to blood-red (when you're a GSL superstar). Unfortunately, the APM colors might show you how bungling of a *SC2* player you really are.

While playing against platinum-league vet Norm Chan, my keyboard never surpassed green (one step above lifeless blue); I could only achieve a satisfying red through rapid-fire-clicking waypoints while my fingers played a drum solo on the hotkeys. After Norm ruthlessly thrashed me, the Marauder added insult to injury by blinking red to make sure I knew I lost. Gee, thanks.

Without the Lite-Brite gimmick, the Marauder is a less-than-stellar keyboard. Razer inexplicably decided to smash the arrow keys and Insert/Home/Page Up block into the numpad—this jarring change left me constantly fumbling for keys. Still, you can reassign almost all of the buttons, and each key has a nice tactile feel: they're sturdy, springy and have an aesthetically-pleasing gloss. But paying $120 for what's essentially a *StarCraft* mood-ring—that spectators will enjoy more than you do—just doesn't make sense. ■ **Lucas Sullivan**

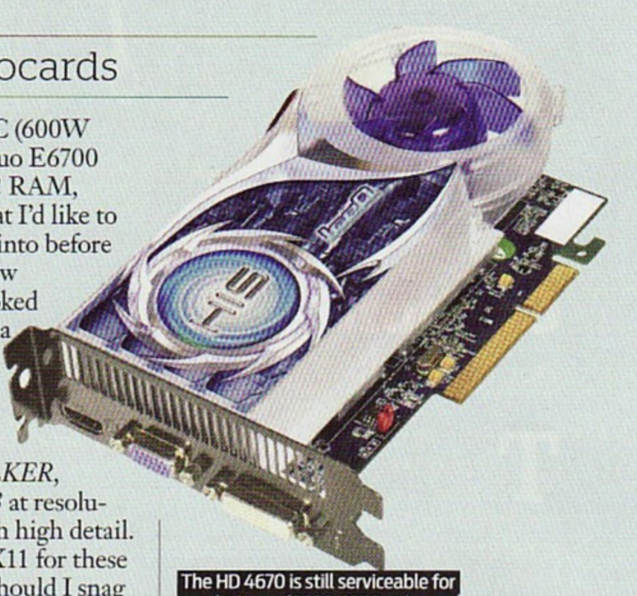
PC GAMER 60

$120, www.razerzone.com ◆ Category: Dream

Q&A

Sub-$65 videocards

Q: I have an old PC (600W PSU, Core 2 Duo E6700 2.66GHz, 4GB DDR2 RAM, GeForce 7950 GT) that I'd like to inject a little more life into before investing in a brand new system. I originally looked at purchasing an Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTS videocard, but it looks like I missed the boat there. I'm looking to play the original *STALKER*, *Far Cry 2*, and *Fallout 3* at resolutions of 1280x1024 with high detail. I don't think I need DX11 for these games, so what GPU should I snag for the time being?
Andrew Wilson

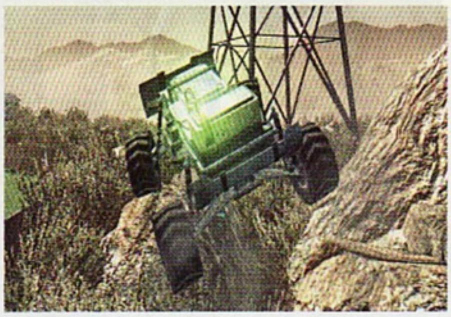


The HD 4670 is still serviceable for resolutions of 1680x1050 or lower.

A: *You made a good call opting to upgrade your videocard before anything else—that GeForce 7950 GT is a dinosaur. You didn't include your budget, but if you were looking for an 8800 GTS, I'd guess you're basking in the $50-$65 range. There are a few great options around there. If you absolutely can't break the $50 mark, check out Sapphire's Radeon HD 4650 (http://bit.ly/4mRGzz)—it doesn't need a power cable from your PSU, and it runs whisper-quiet. If you can swing 65 bucks though, I'd recommend the HIS Radeon HD 4670 (http://bit.ly/fDbgLW). It has a terrific cooling system, and it'll even play* Mass Effect 2 *at medium detail. And believe it or not, you've still got some decent power in that rig. 4GB of RAM is enough for gaming, and while your CPU is a dual-core, few games are optimized for more than two cores anyway. You could squeeze another year or two out of that PC if need be.* **CC**

Hard Stuff Trinity

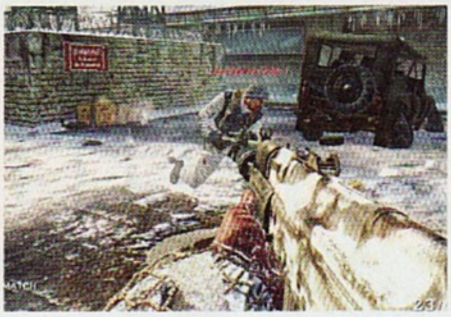
DREAM SYSTEM	MID-RANGE	ENTRY-LEVEL
CASE AND PSU Thermaltake Level 10; Antec HCP 1,200W PSU $1,000	**CASE AND PSU** Corsair 800D; Corsair TX 750W PSU $385	**CASE AND PSU** NZXT Phantom; Corsair 500W PSU $190
PROCESSOR Intel Core i7-980X Extreme 3.33GHz $950	**PROCESSOR** Intel Core i7-2600K Sandy Bridge 3.4GHz $329	**PROCESSOR** Intel Core i3-2100 Sandy Bridge 3.1GHz $125
MOTHERBOARD Asus Rampage III Extreme LGA 1366 $380	**MOTHERBOARD** Asus P8P67 Deluxe LGA 1155 $240	**MOTHERBOARD** Gigabyte GA-P61-USB3-B3 LGA 1155 $90
MEMORY 12GB Corsair Dominator DDR3-1600 RAM $180	**MEMORY** 8GB Patriot Gamer 2 Series DDR3-1600 $90	**MEMORY** 4GB Corsair XMS3 DDR3-1333 $44
OPTICAL DRIVE Samsung SHB123L Blu-ray $65	**OPTICAL DRIVE** Samsung Black SH-S223L LightScribe $22	**OPTICAL DRIVE** Sony DDU1681S $17
HARD DRIVE OCZ Vertex 2 100GB SSD; WD Caviar 2TB $280	**HARD DRIVE** Seagate Barracuda 1.5TB $70	**HARD DRIVE** WD Caviar Blue 500GB $40
SOUNDCARD Creative X-Fi Sound Blaster Titanium HD $157	**SOUNDCARD** Creative X-Fi Sound Blaster Titanium $100	**SOUNDCARD** Onboard $0
VIDEOCARD Nvidia GeForce GTX 580 (x2) $1,000	**VIDEOCARD** Asus ENGTX560 GeForce GTX 560 Ti $260	**VIDEOCARD** EVGA GeForce GTX 550 Ti $150
TOTAL PRICE $4,012	**TOTAL PRICE** $1,496	**TOTAL PRICE** $656



7

Remote threat

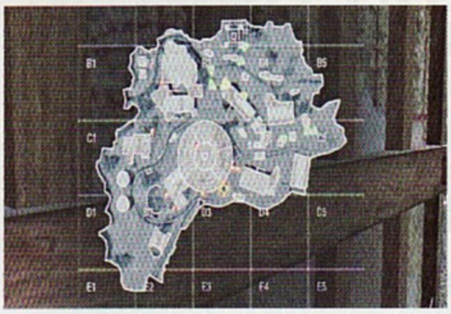
It's hard not to love the RC-XD. It's like a Death Star mouse droid with less of a whistle and more of a bang. What's more, the paths it can take through the maps are always a charm. The best, and least known, takes the remote-controlled bomb on a secret path outside the normal boundaries of Nuketown, over a jump, and then straight into the enemy spawn area.



8

Invisible war

Sashaying across a map like a man of mystery never loses its charm. The *PCG* protip for stealth? Take the Spectre SMG with a suppressor and wintery camouflage if you're on a snowy level. Slot Ghost in as your first perk, Sleight of Hand into slot two and, most importantly, Ninja into the third. You'll rack up kills without a fuss as long as your movement is kept constant.



9

Mortar slaughter

The mortar is another attainable killstreak reward that packs an impressive punch in the right hands. When you're playing an objective-capture game mode (such as Domination) and the enemy has control of all three points, you can guarantee that they're in full defense mode. By pasting your three mortar hits on each of the flags, you stand to wipe out a fair number of the enemy.

10

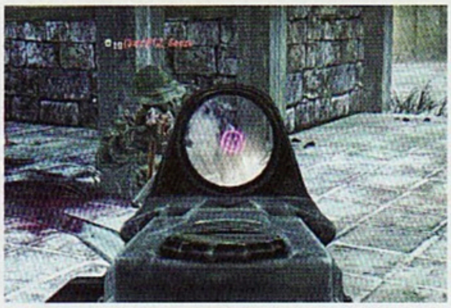
Who needs graphics?

If your game is stuttering, so are your kills. The remedy is brutal: shut down programs running in the background, then turn anti-aliasing off, turn anisotropic filtering down, texture quality low, shadows off, sync every frame off—you know your PC, you know the drill. For more ways to grapple with *Black Ops'* less-than-graceful performance, see http://snipurl.com/1xej9j for what to tweak.

11

Radar love

You shouldn't simply be monitoring your radar mini-display while fighting, you also need to be thinking about how *you* look on it. Knifing and silenced kills won't flush you out, but if you're firing shots in a populated area or there's an enemy spy plane overhead, you're a target—so act like one. Run away after every engagement and back up to a wall when the other team has eyes in the sky.



12

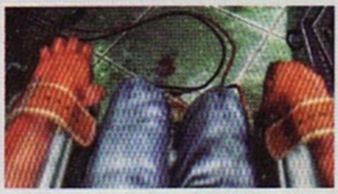
No smiling allowed

Every player goes through a stage when it seems like a great idea to have an eccentric aiming reticule. It might give satisfaction to imagine people watching killcams of your pink heart or smiley face icon zeroing on their behind, but ultimately it's going to muck with your kill/death ratio. For most guns, the best, highest-contrast sight setup is the common red dot planted in a blue lens.

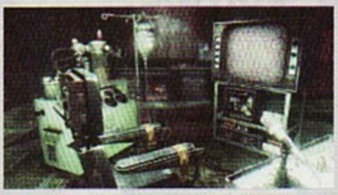
SKILLS

ESCAPE THE DENTIST'S CHAIR

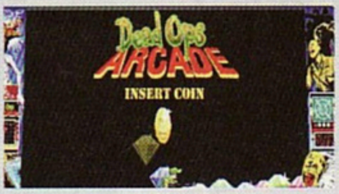
FUN WITH *COD*'S MENU SCREEN



1 "Mason, why are you looking down, then hammering the spacebar and the right mouse button? Mason!" ...is presumably what the disembodied interro-voice is screaming when you help our hero escape his torture chair.



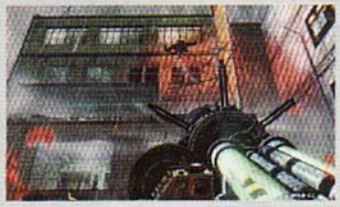
2 With Mason's new freedom you can poke around and even play with a working PC tucked in the corner. Experience with DOS will help you sift through character emails. Tap "DOA" to play a top-down zombie minigame.



3 Alternatively, typing in "Zork" will boot up the adventure that kickstarted all games in which you could go N, E, S, or W before seeing what swear words it knew. Look out for those Grues—rumor has it they're a vicious bunch.

BONUS SKILL

GET A SONIC MEGA-GUN



In the campaign, kill the goons with grenades after the Kowloon "eat glass" scene. Get the tape that pops out of the VCR. In the secret armory, hold F on a similar machine for a secret weapon.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE
PC GAMER
WORLD OF WARCRAFT CATACLYSM
PC Gamer's Guide to the Apocalypse

SAVE 79%*

THE WORLD'S #1 PC GAMES MAGAZINE

12 ISSUES 12 DISCS for $19.95

www.pcgamer.com/replynow

*Subscription offer good in the U.S. only. Newsstand price per issue with disc is U.S. $8.99. For more information visit www.pcgamer.com/customerservice

Game trademarks and copyrights are properties of their respective owners.

Subscription discs are normally CD format; however, PC Gamer may upgrade some subscription discs to DVD format at its discretion.

PC Gamer magazine is published by Future US, Inc.

© 2011 Future US, Inc.

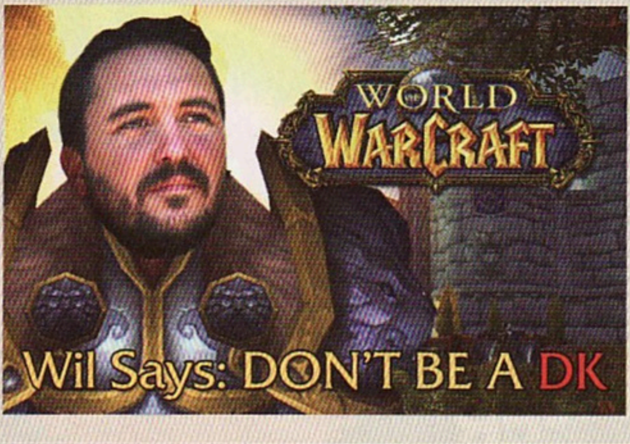
"All the news that's not fit for blue posts"

The Daily Blink

Early Edition

Today, mostly clear internet, high of 18Mb/s. **Tonight**, strong chance of server maintenence, roommate downloading torrents, low of 4Mb/s. Details, page **4B.**

May 3rd, 2011 | by Chris Hanel and Michael Owen | 2g 50s


WORLD OF WARCRAFT
Wil Says: DON'T BE A DK

Blizzard Announces New Hero Class: Wil Wheaton

Beta testers and fervent followers of *World of Warcraft* are beginning to buzz about rumors that the top-ranked MMO is poised to add a new hero class: Wil "Wil" Wheaton.

"I'm playing a Level 62 Wil Wheaton right now, and I'm having a great time," said a source inside Blizzard. "Best of all is his special ability—Wil has an instant cast that incapacitates anyone that nerd rages, even in your own raid or pug. And you won't even believe the stats on this offhand tome I wrote and published myself."

While Blizzard remains coy on the subject, the inclusion of a new "Beard" armor class and scuttlebutt from beta testers about plans to add Neil Patrick Harris to balance out PvP have made it harder to deny.

Full coverage, including Sandeep Parikh's reaction, **1D**

NEWSLINE

Rexxar in PR Flap

■ Champion of the Horde has his reputation called into question after being spotted at Beiber concert. **2B**

Raid Suffers Betrayal

■ Druid discovered to not have his shoulder slot reforged, unmasked as an obvious noob. **Living**

NPC Protests Come to End

A disagreement between executives at Blizzard Entertainment and NPCs protesting to demand better working hours and revenue sharing has come to an end after after weeks of bitter negotiation and an inability to find middle ground.

Witnesses to the picketing said that a resolution was finally found when network administrators reset the server and all characters returned to their respective zones. Strike organizers were unsure how to comment after not remembering the protest, one only repeating "What brings you here?" after repeated questions.

IN TOMORROW'S ISSUE

■ Webcomic Authors Discover Creating for Magazine "Waaaaay More Pressure" Than Creating for Website.

Rocker in Repose: Illidan Stormrage, left, reflects on a life dedicated to rock. "I don't have to throw the horns, man. I *have* the horns! ROCK ON!"

Illidan Eager for Black Temple's 2011 "Heroic Comeback Tour"

Music circles are currently abuzz with the revelation that Illidan Stomrage and his aging band, Black Temple, are hitting the road for a 2011 reunion tour after years out of the spotlight.

"I couldn't stay away any longer," said Stormrage in an interview outside his home in Shadowmoon Valley. "Getting beaten repeatedly by those raiders made me realize a lot of things. I'm a new man now, and two years sober. It's time to get back up on the mount. I can't become the next Charlie Sheen."

However, Stormrage is more than aware of the different obstacles that face this new phase of his project. The band has been out of music circles for an extended period, and are looking for a new drummer since the death of the Shade of Akama in a freak wind rider accident.

Stormrage wasn't worried, however, about also replacing longtime bassist Kael'thalas Sunstrider after frequent creative differences. "Kael was just a setback," said the Betrayer. "Besides, Lor'themar can really shred. We're all fine."

The band is currently booking shows in several cities, with their sendoff set to take place at the All Cleveland Boat Show on June 5. "I hope Cleveland is prepared to rock," said Illidan with a smirk. "But we already know that—well, yeah, you get the idea."

ENTERTAINMENT

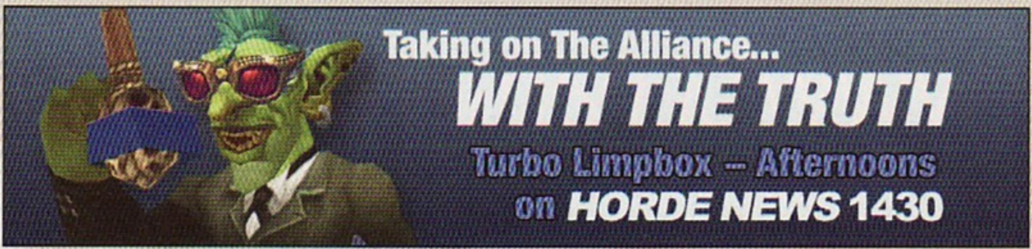
Weekend Box Office

1.	*Twelve Angry Mobs*	162.3m g
2.	*The MobFather*	90.9m g
3.	*Ocean's 25*	41.9m g
4.	*Ocean's 10*	39.0m g
5.	*Ghostcrawler in the Shell*	15.1m g
6.	*Some Like it Prot*	12.7m g
7.	*To Pwn a Mockingbird*	12.5m g
8.	*The Gripes of Wrath*	9.2m g
9.	*Annie Thrall*	4.0m g
10.	*A Pug's Life*	1.8m g

Do You Wanna Hire My Avatar: ABC thinks *The Guild*'s Felicia Day will get nerds to watch football.

ABC Bets on Felicia Day

■ Network courts "geek demo," promotes appearances on *Monday Night Football, Detroit 187, Wifeswap.* **4D**



ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO
E3
EXCEEDING
IMAGINATION

E3 Expo is the preeminent global trade event for computer and video games. It's all about the innovation, creativity, business, and imagination of the most compelling sector of the entertainment industry.

EXPERIENCE ALL THAT E3 EXPO HAS TO OFFER BY REGISTERING TODAY AT WWW.E3EXPO.COM.

esa entertainment software association

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER

JUNE 7-9, 2011

WWW.E3EXPO.COM

E3 Expo is a trade event and only qualified industry professionals may attend.
No one under 17 will be admitted, including infants. Visit www.E3Expo.com for registration guidelines.

© 2011 ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE ASSOCIATION

Produced By
IDG WORLD EXPO

DIGITALSTORM
A+ RATED: THE ELITE STANDARD

CUSTOMIZE & BUY: **WWW.DIGITALSTORMONLINE.COM**
OR CALL: 1-866-817-8676

Starting At:
$899

YOU DREAM IT, WE BUILD IT.

Experience an entirely new level of performance, design, and engineering with an award winning Digital Storm PC. Our obsession with benchmark crushing power and silky smooth frame rates, fuels our desire to build the industry's most elite systems. Visit our website and customize a new powerful PC today.

YOU KNOW YOU WANT ONE.

A+ RATED BUSINESS

BATTLEFIELD
BAD COMPANY 2

Made with love by

RETROMAGS

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!